

**Testimony of Terri Schelter
Western New York Health Care Campaign**

**Public Hearing on “Partnership for Coverage”
Wednesday, October 3, 2007**

Commissioner Daines, Superintendent Dinallo, and esteemed members of the panel: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the issue of universal healthcare coverage. My name is Terri Schelter and I am the Chair of the Western New York Health Care Campaign.

The Western New York Health Care Campaign is a coalition of organizations, including area non-profits, health care providers, health advocacy organizations, labor unions, and faith groups, working to solve the crisis in health care access, quality and affordability. We engage in educational programs, community action, and grassroots lobbying campaigns to bring about a health care system whereby everyone - no matter their occupation, income level, or status - has access to quality affordable health care.

These efforts are particularly important here in Buffalo, the second-poorest big city in the nation according to new estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau. Nearly 30% of our residents are considered poor.

Only Detroit has higher poverty among American cities with populations of more than 250,000.

Western New York has seen a continued decline in good producing jobs, manufacturing jobs, and retail trade. Just last month, Buffalo's American Axle on East Delavan announced it was eliminating hundreds of well-paying jobs. This is an all too familiar scenario for residents of Western New York.

Not surprisingly, over 154,000 residents of Western New York are uninsured, while countless others pay premiums, deductibles and co-pays on insurance policies that still fail to meet their needs. On behalf of these people, I stand before you today to demand universal access to health care for all New Yorkers that is affordable, portable, consumer-friendly, and that covers the full range of health care needs – prevention, early detection and treatment.

With me today is Amy Liberatore, a volunteer for the Western New York Health Care Campaign. Amy is here to share her experience with health care coverage that has not been affordable or consumer-friendly, and to describe the impact that has had on her family.