

For Immediate Release

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Health Care Advocates Collect Over 38,000 Signatures For Health Reform Ballot Proposal In Ten Days

[Boston] - In just ten days, the Massachusetts Affordable Care Today! (MassACT!) Campaign, a diverse coalition of health care, religious, business, labor, and social justice organizations, has collected over 38,000 signatures in an effort to qualify the Massachusetts Quality Affordable Health Care Act for the November 2006 ballot. Driven by over 2,000 volunteers throughout the state, the campaign has collected over half of the 65,825 signatures required to qualify their comprehensive health care reform proposal for the ballot in record time.

“Residents from throughout the state have rallied around the call to make quality health care affordable and accessible to everyone in Massachusetts,” said David Jordan, spokesperson for the MassACT! Campaign. “In just ten days our volunteers have built momentum for an unstoppable health reform movement.”

Over 532,000 Massachusetts residents – more than one in ten adults – have no health insurance, and thousands more are losing their insurance each month. MassACT! Campaign aims to solve Massachusetts’ health care crisis by passing the Massachusetts Quality Affordable Health Care Act, a law that:

- **Reduces premiums** - ending the insurance surcharge now tacked onto premiums to pay for uninsured patients who get care in emergency rooms and other sites.
- **Increases quality affordable coverage** - providing sliding-scale assistance to moderate-income families struggling to afford health care costs.
- **Helps small businesses provide coverage** - expanding the Insurance Partnership program and establishing a reinsurance program to reduce premiums.
- **Makes our health system fair** - funding expanded coverage through an affordable assessment on firms that refuse to provide coverage to their workers.
- **Covers our children and most vulnerable residents** - expanding the affordable MassHealth program.
- **Lowers health costs and improves health** - increasing the cigarette tax by 60 cents to reduce smoking and to fund affordable coverage.

(more)

Central to the campaign's health reform and grassroots efforts are religious affiliates such as the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), which is coordinating over 1000 volunteers from religious organizations in the Metropolitan Boston area. Volunteers from religious congregations have joined with other MassACT! Campaign volunteers to collect signatures at parades, festivals, polling stations, and youth sporting events. In addition to collecting signatures at community gatherings, GBIO congregations have circulated the ballot initiative in their congregations.

"Taking care of the needy in our community is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic," says Msgr. George Carlson of Holy Name Parish in West Roxbury. "I am sure that every parish in the Diocese has people who are struggling to afford the high cost of health insurance, or who are going without. I am proud that, thanks to strong lay leadership, we have collected over 500 signatures for this ballot initiative at Holy Name."

"As the Jewish community celebrates our new year, the shofar blast reminds us of our sacred obligation to act for justice," says Rabbi Jonah Pesner of Temple Israel of Boston. "During these days of awe, Jews around the world will engage in an accounting of the soul in which we ask ourselves whether we have lived up to our responsibility to treat all our neighbors in accordance with our belief that we are all created in the image of God. In this time, members of Temple Israel and other Jewish congregations will join with faith leaders throughout the Commonwealth to collect signatures for this crucial health care ballot initiative. We all must atone for the collective sin of our unacceptable reality – that over 500,000 souls in Massachusetts have no health insurance."

"We've been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of our thousands of volunteers, and by the profound interest of the citizens we are meeting in supermarkets, church halls, business forums, health centers, union meetings, block parties, and town parades," concludes Jordan. "There is clearly an unstoppable appetite for real health reform across the Commonwealth. These first 38,000 signatures were easy to collect, and with our unprecedented coalition, the next will be even easier."

About the MassACT! Campaign

The MassACT! Campaign is a statewide, grassroots effort that is being led by a coalition of businesses, health care, religious, labor, and social justice organizations who are committed to achieving real health reform by advocating for an initiative petition: the Massachusetts Quality Affordable Health Care Act. The proposal will benefit all Massachusetts residents by expanding quality coverage, saving residents money on health insurance premiums and helping small businesses to provide coverage to their workers. For more information on the campaign, please visit www.massact.org.