



STATEMENT TO CONTRA COSTA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ON PROPOSED CUTS TO CONTRA COSTA HEALTH SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Prepared by CCISCO: Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization

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Today, as the State of California celebrates the contributions of César Chávez, the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors is contemplating an action that does tremendous damage to his legacy. CCISCO: Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization, an interfaith community organization representing over 35,000 families across Contra Costa County stands in complete opposition to the proposed removal of 5,500 adult immigrants from the Basic Health Care program. We believe that this proposal is morally flawed, fiscally irresponsible and bad public health policy.

At the recommendation of the Board of Supervisors during the March 17 meeting, CCISCO leaders have organized three separate community hearings in West, Central and East Contra Costa County over the past five days which were attended by 300 community residents. We would like to thank Supervisors Bonilla and Gioia and Dr. William Walker for their participation in these hearings. At these hearings, residents spoke courageously about the impact this proposed cut would have on their lives, their families and their communities. In each of the hearings, residents suggested creative solutions to help bridge the budget gap. In every hearing, residents testified about the importance of access to health care and the need for the Board of Supervisors to make public health and access to health care a priority during difficult budget times. In addition, we signed up over 270 residents to make calls to Congress to ensure that health care reform is fully funded in this year's budget.

We would also like you to know that each of the congregations that hosted the community hearings on the proposed health care cuts are also congregations that hosted citizenship drives and citizenship classes over the past year and we would like to thank Supervisors Piepho, Glover, and Gioia for your attendance at those events. Over the past year, CCISCO leaders helped 240 residents begin the naturalization process and many voted in the November 2008 election. In Contra Costa County by the year 2012, there will be 193,886 new immigrant voters. Between immigrant youth coming of voting age and immigrants eligible to naturalize and total naturalized adults, this is a staggering number. We believe that cutting Basic Health Care to immigrant adults sends the wrong signal to these new citizens and voters about the values and priorities of our publicly elected representatives.

In addition, at the emergency session convened last Monday that was attended by representatives of nearly every health care provider in Contra Costa County, there was broad opposition to the proposal to remove undocumented immigrants from the Basic Health Care program and a set of creative short and long term proposals to help bridge the funding gap.

Some of the proposed short term solutions that we believe that the Board of Supervisors should consider include:

- 1) Partnering with community-based federally qualified health centers (“community clinics”) to become providers in the Basic Health Care program. It is believed that the community clinics could help the County to expand capacity and achieve some cost savings over the long run.
- 2) Increase the co-payments for existing participants in the Basic Health Care program. Although we recognize that participants in the Basic Health Care program do not have many resources, we believe that increasing the co-payment is preferable to cutting 5,500 residents from the program entirely.
- 3) Partner with Operation Access and local hospitals to implement a pilot program in Contra Costa County to provide surgical procedures at reduced cost for Basic Health Care participants.
- 4) Explore utilizing a portion of the Rainy Day Fund to help close the budget gap. As one of the participants at our community hearing in Oakley eloquently stated: “It isn’t raining, it’s pouring!”

In the Christian Bible, the Book of Matthew tells the story of four men who were trying to see Jesus of Nazareth and seek healing for a friend who was paralyzed. The crowds gathered around the Jesus of Nazareth were so large that they could not enter the house in which he was staying. The story describes how the men climbed to the roof and removed the tiles and then lowered their friend so that he could be healed.

In difficult times we are called to be courageous and creative to address the needs of our communities. We are calling on each of you to be both courageous and creative. The Board of Supervisors has a clear choice: we ask that you chose the path that requires innovation and integrity and that you do not bow to the calls to be expedient and unfair.