

Hi folks,

To be honest, I didn't take "minutes" last night (May 10), but here's my best effort at a summary. This is going out to those of you who attended, and a few people who indicated their interest but just couldn't make the meeting.

We had 15 people in the room, including a number of health and mental health care providers, and representatives from several groups working on Medicare for All. Introductions gave us a good sense of who was gathered.

The purpose of the meeting was to begin forming a western Mass regional network for health care as a human right. One of the main objectives of such a movement will be to help pass Single Payer legislation in the state. We will be coordinating with the statewide coalition called Mass-Care to reach that goal.

Jon led a "mapping" exercise of the four western Mass counties to show where there are already "hubs" of activity in support of Single Payer, and where there are organizations that support SP but may not be currently active with this campaign. For example, he showed us locations for the Mass Nurses Association, Jobs with Justice, area Labor Councils, and the League of Women Voters. We then added groups represented in the room and others we knew of – including the health care committees of Pathways indivisible group in Northampton; Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution; Amherst's LWV; Jewish Community of Amherst; and Worthington's "People's Health Care Action." Apologies if I've forgotten to mention any groups we discussed.

The coordinating team for the network – which includes Jon Weissman and me – will be doing whatever we can to support hubs already in action, connect people to active hubs, and help initiate new hubs in areas where none currently exist. We hope that these regional network meetings will provide support for western Mass activists by providing community, updates, resource-sharing, discussion of strategy and new ideas, and other movement-building activities.

We also discussed legislative and other actions that individuals and hubs could get involved with -- including outreach, education and lobbying activity. Some hubs are already in action: The Pathways group is currently drafting a pro-SP resolution to bring to their City Council; the Worthington group will host a forum on health insurance issues on May 24; the JCA group is planning an educational program for the fall; the Franklin County CPR group helped pass Town Meeting resolutions about SP in several towns this spring.

Handouts gave more specific information about the two Medicare for All bills currently in the Health Care Financing Committee. A public hearing will be held soon in Boston, and then the committee will determine if they advance or not for debate by the full legislature. We handed out a chart with information about all the western Mass legislators, and contact information for the chairs of the HCF committee.

What kinds of support will be helpful to people getting involved with SP organizing? Here are some of the responses we heard last night:

- More information about Single Payer – “SP 101” – got it!
- Minutes from tonight’s meeting – done!
- Online resources, such as a Facebook group and web page – we’ll be working on these.
- Ways to connect for people who don’t live near an active hub – yes, important question. Are there organizations that can host a SP program to get the ball rolling?
- Things to do right now - contact your own representative and senator: if they are supporters – like Peter Kocot in Northampton - ask them to speak in favor of the Medicare for All bills at the public hearing. If they don’t support, find out why and let them know why it matters to you. Let us know about your contacts – we want to keep track and strengthen support among as many western Mass legislators as possible.

Finally, we talked about the next meeting. Decided, for now, to rotate monthly meetings between Tuesdays and Wednesdays. We’ll be doing more outreach, too. We’ll post the date of the next meeting as soon as we figure it out and the location.

NOTE: We’ll be posting updates and meeting info on the Health Care Action (HCA) listserv, which is currently our main way of reaching Single Payer activists throughout the region. If you signed in last night, you are now subscribed to the HCA list. If you did not attend last night, and are not sure if you are subscribed, please respond to this email and let me know you want to be on the HCA list.

Thanks to everyone for good energy, good ideas, and your interest in making Health Care as a Human Right more than just a slogan!!

Onward,
Deborah