

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy  
Chairman, United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy:

We would like to thank you for your leadership through the Judiciary Committee in ensuring meaningful health information privacy. We appreciate your record of support for comprehensive health benefits and cost control, especially with respect to prescription drugs in Medicare. We would like to ask you to investigate another important problem people face when it comes to affording health care: medical-related bankruptcy.

As you know, some half of all personal bankruptcies are caused by medical debt. Three-fourths of those individuals were insured at the onset of their bankrupting illness. There is well-deserved concern that health insurance will not pay for medical care when a family needs it most, leaving them to foot the bill and face financial devastation. Families lose life savings, homes, jobs, and in some cases, loved ones, and are forced to spend time negotiating with insurance companies and hospitals for charges that they thought were covered instead of focusing on getting well.

We ask you to convene Senate Judiciary Committee hearings to investigate the conditions facing those who file for bankruptcy as the result of medical costs. At this critical juncture of discussion concerning both the economy and health care, understanding the realities of people's experience is critical to the Senate's deliberations and appropriate legislative remedies.

Due to the brisk time frame during which the Senate is discussing health care reform, we ask that you convene hearings as soon as possible in order to provide the Senate with the needed information from people struggling under the weight of medical debt.

Thank you for your attention to this request for Judiciary Committee hearings that would inform the larger discussion on health care reform and ultimately result in better policy.

Respectfully,

Lindol Atkins, President Vermont State Labor Council, AFL-CIO  
Dawn Stanger, President Vermont Workers Center/Jobs with Justice  
Traven Leyshon, Vermont Coordinator Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare  
Jennifer Henry, President Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals Local 5221  
Brian Walsh, Vice President Vermont-NEA  
Damon Hall, VT Industry Analyst, Ironworkers Local 7