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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT FOR: A-6058 (Gottfried) / S-5474 (Rivera)

To: NYS Assembly & Senate

Date: April 2022

Subject: AN ACT to amend the public health law and the state finance law, in relation to establishing New York Health

The League of Women Voters of New York State strongly supports the New York Health Act (NYHA), legislation to establish a health program of guaranteed, universal, comprehensive, and affordable health services. This legislation meets the League’s healthcare goals around coverage, eligibility, equity, and access, as well as meeting the League’s financial criteria around feasibility, cost controls, and transparency.

Equitable Access to Comprehensive and High-Quality Coverage:

In its Healthcare Positions, the League supports “uniform eligibility and coverage of essential healthcare services, both physical and behavioral, ideally including coverage of services such as vision, dental, hearing, and long-term care ... The League has a strong commitment to an emphasis on preventive care, health education, and appropriate use of primary care services.” Because of the scope of comprehensive coverage that will be guaranteed to every New York resident through New York Health, the League supports this legislation.

Affordable Cost, Regardless of Income, Illness, Employment Status, or County of Residence:

The League, believes that the state’s “primary role in healthcare is to assure that quality care is available to all New Yorkers ... including the medically indigent.” Because the NYHA eliminates all financial barriers to care — premiums, co-pays, deductibles, co-insurance, and out-of-pocket expenses — for prescription drugs and devices and essential healthcare services - it meets our criteria for access.

The League favors “health insurance access independent of employment status” so that job-loss does not deprive workers and their families of access to healthcare. The current pandemic has revealed the societal risk of tying healthcare to employment: in 2020 a million jobs were lost statewide. When workers lost health coverage, their family members also lost access. And two-thirds of bankruptcies are triggered by medical bills for those who were employed and insured when their health crisis began.

The League states that, “As public health crises increasingly reveal, NYS should protect the health of its most vulnerable populations, urban and rural, in order to protect the health of everyone.” The pandemic has revealed deep healthcare disparities around race and residence: rates of infection and death for Black and Indigenous people run two to three times the rate for Whites, and Covid-19 has also sickened rural residents of all ethnicities at disproportionate rates. Because New York Health will significantly ameliorate disparities around rates of illness, progression of illness, and early death, the League supports this legislation.

Financially Feasible and Evidence-Based Cost Controls:

The League describes the “single-payer concept as a viable and desirable approach to implement League positions,” and calls for funding by “broad-based and progressive state taxes on earned and unearned income.” The League also articulates specific feasibility criteria that the NYHA meets, including appropriate levels of federal support, sufficient cost savings “so that estimated overall program cost will approximate the cost of current overall health services,” and creation of a “healthcare trust fund, managed by the state, that operates in a similarly efficient fashion as Social Security or Medicare trust funds.”

Finally, the League specifies a number of cost-control methods, including reduced administrative costs, “volume discounts for pharmaceuticals and durable medical equipment to bring prices closer to international levels,” investment in well-care to increase health and reduce preventable adverse health events/expenditures, as well as home-care services to reduce institutionalization. Because the League concludes that NYHA addresses financial feasibility and cost-controls appropriately, the League supports this legislation.

Transparency & Public Participation:

The League calls for “public input as integral to the process for determining healthcare coverage and funding.... NYS residents must be provided with information on the healthcare system and on the implications of health policy decisions.” The proposed NYH Board of Trustees and six Regional Councils establish mechanisms for transparency and public participation as favored by the League, and for this reason the League supports this legislation to create New York Health.

For all these reasons, the League of Women Voters of NYS strongly supports A-6058/S-5474.

Note: Quoted material comes from the LWVNY Position on Healthcare or the Position on Financing of Healthcare, Adopted March 20, 2021.