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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

Testimony for Legislative Public Hearings on Health/Medicaid 2008 - 09 Executive Budget Proposal

February 6, 2008

Good morning, my name is Donna Packard-Mahoney and I am the Health Care Specialist for the League of Women Voters of New York State. With me today is Barbara Bartoletti the Legislative Director for the League of Women Voters of New York State. This testimony has been prepared by both Ms. Bartoletti and myself. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to address this hearing.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has sixty local Leagues statewide.

The League has long been critics of the past budget process. We want to take this opportunity today, to applaud both the Governor and the Legislature for the passage of the budget reform legislation early last session. From our observation, the quick start provisions of the law have worked well, and the public last fall had an opportunity to analyze the budget and comment on agency budgets at public hearings across the state. This is certainly a step forward as we try to increase public awareness and participation in the budget process. As you know the Budget Reform Act of 2007 mandates the use of conference committees. We urge both the

Senate and Assembly to form their Conference Committees soon; we will monitor that process closely.

In 1990, the League undertook a two-year study on the funding and delivery of health care in the U.S., which culminated in the League's 1993 position statement. Since that time the League has lobbied and testified on numerous bills that safeguard public access to health care such as HCRA, CHP, and FHP. The League believes that a basic level of quality physical and mental health care for all state residents should include, in addition to primary preventive care, prenatal and reproductive health care, acute care, long-term care, mental health care, funding for health promotion and disease prevention programs.

Health care policy goals should include the equitable distribution of services and the efficient and economical delivery of care along with regulatory incentives to encourage the development of cost-effective alternative methods of delivery. Equitable distribution of services means that individuals should have access to a basic level of care regardless of income, age, health status, and geographical location.

The League applauds the Governor's effort in his Executive Budget to increase access to health care for New Yorkers through a variety of initiatives and the League supports the following:

- Expansion of The Child Health Plus program from 250% to 400% of the federal poverty level.
- The "Doctors Across New York" program.
- Expanding nurse family partnerships and maternal case management services

- Universal access to childhood immunizations for children & adolescents up to age 19 without charge.
- Extending Medicaid coverage to foster children up to age 21
- Streamlining the re-certification process for Medicaid and Family Health Plus through the creation of a State Enrollment Portal.
- The creation of a new EPIC Discount Card Program for financially vulnerable persons regardless of age.
- Increased funding for primary care enhancements including diabetes and asthma self-management.
- Continued funding and support for stem cell research.
- Increased funding to support childhood lead poisoning prevention.
- Establishing multi-state pharmacy purchasing pools for bulk purchasing of prescription drugs.
- Risk assessments for all pregnant women.
- Increased support for obesity prevention activities and healthy eating collaboratives such as The Healthy Schools Act.
- The establishment of a comprehensive Hepatitis C program.
- Support for HIV risk reduction and Communities of Color initiatives.
- Expansion of the Rural Tele-psychiatry program.

We would encourage the legislature to increase the tobacco tax to \$1.50 per pack as an incentive to decrease smoking among adolescents thereby decreasing young peoples risk of developing chronic lung diseases such emphysema and lung cancer.

We support the governor's initiatives to tax small cigars as cigarettes, and hope that both houses of the legislature will support both of these health care initiatives within the budget.

The League encourages both the Senate and the Assembly's support of these initiatives, which will, increases access to primary and preventive care.

Better primary care as a function of funding is good public health policy and this year's Executive budget emphasizes such an agenda through a number of cost-effective actions. Updating Graduate Medical Education reimbursement and funding along with updating inpatient costs will result in savings to support several primary care initiatives as opposed to more costly inpatient care. This rebasing of funding will include the recruitment of physicians to serve people in medically underserved areas. Combined with increasing the reimbursement rate to primary care providers, the state will begin to address the cost and inequity of our current system that oftentimes impacts our State's emergency rooms. A new methodology, the Ambulatory Patients Groups (APGs) will reimburse providers based on the intensity of services performed rather than the number of visits provided increasing patients' quality of care. Investments will be made for hospital-based ambulatory clinics, ambulatory surgery and emergency rooms, community-based clinics, and targeted enhancements for physicians. These cost-saving initiatives support the League's position of access, quality, and cost-effective primary and preventive care.

In light of New York State's effort toward increasing preventive health care and addressing chronic illness such as obesity and diabetes, the League encourages both houses of the Legislature to consider in their budgetary deliberations, the dire lack of access to dental care for New Yorkers of all ages, and in particular children receiving Medicaid. If children are to be

able to take advantage of the healthy eating and other advances for preventive health care being put forth in this budget attention must be given to children's ability to actively participate in these initiatives, education and outreach must be part of any preventive programs. Poor dental health is a major public health issue cited by the Surgeon General, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentists. Among the little or no cost opportunities to begin to attack this disease, and it is a disease; the Legislature should consider reintroduction and passage of the 2005 Assembly Bill A.4012. This bill would require warning labels to be placed on baby bottles and children's sippy cups, at no cost to the State, and could be a first step in reducing dental disease among our most vulnerable population, children saving costly dental work as these children age.

Thank you again for giving the League the opportunity to address this Budget Hearing. The League will continue to monitor the budget process for openness and timeliness. We will also continue to advocate for initiatives that support the League's positions on equity, quality, access, and prevention.