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Health Care Forum Brings Together Faith Leaders and Community Members

CINCINNATI – Faith leaders and community members came together today to send a message to elected officials that access to health care must be protected. At a forum hosted by Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio (UHCAN Ohio), local clergy spoke about the importance of affordable, accessible health care. Community members gave testimony on how the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid Expansion affect their lives.

“The religious disposition is to take seriously the claim of a neighbor when it isn’t in our own immediate self-interest... because he or she is connected to us,” said Right Reverend Thomas Breidenthal of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. “So the call to universal health care is a call to the realization as a nation and as a people that democracy is there to support our connection to each other, not to help us to escape from it.”

This week, President Trump and Republican members of the House of Representatives again tried to revive their bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act with changes that would drastically alter protections for the millions of Americans with pre-existing conditions and take coverage from the poor. Speakers at the forum encouraged people of faith and all Ohioans to stand up against unjust changes to health care.

“The Jewish community shares a concern for justice that requires that we support a health care system that meets the needs of all people,” said Rabbi Sissy Coran of the Rockdale Temple. “The changes being proposed by Congress to the Affordable Care Act would wipe out access to health care for many people, especially older pre-Medicare adults with limited incomes.”

Reverend Damon Lynch Jr. offered his thoughts on the current health care controversy. “In Cincinnati and Hamilton County and surrounding counties the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion have made a difference in the access to health care. In Ohio the uninsured rate has been nearly cut in half. We can’t go back from that and call ourselves a moral society.”

Imam Ismaeel Chartier spoke on the responsibility of elected officials to protect their constituents’ rights to health care: “We have a God-given right to be healthy. Anybody who’s in political office needs to realize that God is going to ask them if they fulfilled that right... And we as people of faith need to hold them accountable to us. If they don’t want to talk to us, we keep knocking on their doors until they let us in.”

Tony Stieritz, Director of Catholic Social Action at the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, said: “At the fundamental heart of this issue, this is about the value of human life... As Catholics, we believe that health care is a human right... No amount of money, no amount of resources should stand in the way of doing whatever we possibly can to save what God has created.”

Reverend Elmer Martin called on people of faith to continue working to protect health care. “You better wake up and realize they’re hoping we go to sleep, they’re hoping we get confused. They hope we give up and give in... But you need to keep coming back until we get it done.”

UHCAN Ohio is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit organization building the voice of consumers to achieve quality, affordable, accessible health coverage for all Ohioans. www.uhcanohio.org

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