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Commissioner Sullivan, members of the commission:

Thank for you the opportunity to provide a statement at this important hearing. I applaud your Department's decision to review Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's rate increase request, which is the public's only opportunity to avoid an unconscionable rate increase in Connecticut's individual health care marketplace. The devastating size and impact of the proposal on the residents in Connecticut with individual insurance coverage through Anthem demands intervention from your office.

As you know, earlier this month I joined with Representative DeLauro in expressing opposition to Anthem's proposed premium rate increase for consumers in the state's individual insurance market. The proposal, which requests rate increases between 22 and 32 percent, will have devastating financial and health implications for individuals and families in our eastern Connecticut region and across the state.

As I mentioned in my letter with Representative DeLauro, approximately 326,000 residents in Connecticut were uninsured in 2007. It's now estimated that the number of uninsured has climbed to 420,000 in light of increasing economic pressures. Anthem's proposed rate increase will potentially impact 56,000 residents, which will undoubtedly force many more out of coverage.

In his response to our letter, David Fusco, President of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Connecticut, stated that he shares our concerns about the need to keep health care premiums affordable. A 22 to 32 percent increase in premiums will simply not be affordable and will force many out of coverage. Unfortunately again, due to the relentless consolidation of health insurers nationally and in Connecticut, there is little or no recourse for customers who would like another option.

Anthem's announcement comes in the midst of national efforts to comprehensively reform our health care system. There is little disagreement that the status quo in our health care system is unacceptable, and Anthem's recent request underscores the need to take action. Americans need more competition and greater choice in their health coverage – and proposals under consideration in Congress today would help address some of the core underlying issues being addressed here today. Ironically, one of the keystones of reform sought by President Obama-- a guaranteed public health insurance option for America is opposed by Blue Cross's Washington lobbyists.

I encourage the Connecticut Insurance Department to seriously weigh the comments made by the consumers, the individuals and families that will be impacted by the increases. I would further encourage Commissioner Sullivan and the Connecticut Insurance Department to use its powers and protect Connecticut consumers by eliminating or mitigating this request.

Again, thank you for your consideration of this important issue and for holding this hearing today.

Sincerely,



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress