

PRESS RELEASE

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CATANIA INTRODUCES PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

HEALTHY DC ACT WILL EXPAND COVERAGE TO APPROXIMATELY 45,000 UNINSURED DISTRICT RESIDENTS

Washington, D.C. – Today, Councilmember David Catania (At-Large), joined by eight other Councilmembers, introduced a plan to provide health insurance to approximately 45,000 uninsured District residents. The “Healthy DC Act of 2008” will give uninsured individuals who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid or the D.C. Healthcare Alliance the ability to receive insurance for a modest premium of between \$20 and \$100 per month.

“Healthy DC will be the most innovative method of achieving universal health care in the country,” said Catania. “We are very close to universal coverage thanks to our generous Medicaid and Alliance programs. Healthy DC is the next step in making sure that our residents have access to comprehensive health care.”

Catania has been working with CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, the region’s largest health insurer, to develop the benefit. The District’s share of the program cost is estimated at \$21 million. CareFirst has proposed donating \$5 million to the program and permitting beneficiaries to use its extensive network of physicians and specialists.

“Healthy DC is based on the concept of shared responsibility,” explained Catania. “It is designed for residents who can afford to contribute to a health plan, but who cannot afford premiums of several hundred dollars per month.”

The Act also proposes increasing the reimbursement rates paid by the District’s Medicaid program to equal those paid by the Medicare program. Currently, Medicaid reimburses physicians at a much lower rate than Medicare. The result is that many healthcare providers choose not to participate in the Medicaid program, leaving low-income residents with few options for care.

“The lack of adequate Medicaid reimbursement rates has created an illusory benefit whereby Medicaid recipients have coverage but can’t see a doctor when they need to,” said Catania. “Increasing these rates will draw physicians and specialists back into our Medicaid program so that we can start tackling our city’s health disparities.”

Catania plans to include the Healthy DC Act as part of the FY 2009 budget currently before the Council. The bill calls for an implementation date of June 1, 2009.