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Maine Chamber of Commerce Lawsuit Against Dirigo Hypocritical and Deceptive

Group claiming to represent Maine business is trying to take away health care to hundreds of small businesses.

- Maine Chamber of Commerce has spent millions of dollars fighting the funding for Dirigo Health, called the “savings offset payment” since Dirigo began—even though Dirigo provides insurance to 700 small businesses and more than 17,000 hard working Maine Families.
- Maine Chamber of Commerce is also leading efforts with big out-of-state business to fight the new funding for Dirigo: a small tax on beer, wine and sugary beverages.
- Maine Chamber of Commerce helped spend millions of dollars to tell residents to overturn those new “beverage” taxes—Telling voters NO ONE would lose their Dirigo Health Care if residents voted out the “beverage taxes” because the savings offset payment would still exist
- Just days before the election the Maine Chamber filed a lawsuit asking the Superior Court to remove the “savings offset payment” too.
- Maine Chamber of Commerce has taken every step it can to remove any funding source for Dirigo, and is in essence pulling Dirigo out from under the thousands of small Maine businesses, kids and families who count on it for health coverage.
- The Chamber has helped spend at least \$5 million dollars trying to get rid of Dirigo through fighting the savings offset payment and the “beverage taxes.” **That money could have insured thousands of Maine residents and businesses.**

(Augusta) Maine’s largest consumer health organization, Consumers for Affordable Health Care (CAHC), finds the lawsuit the Maine State Chamber of Commerce filed Thursday hypocritical and deceptive. As a leader of the Yes on One campaign, the Chamber has repeatedly claimed no Mainers

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

insured under Dirigo would lose their health coverage if voters chose to repeal the new so called “beverage taxes”. The Chamber says that the current funding source, called the Savings Offset Payment, would be there to fund the program if the repeal effort succeeded. Now, the Chamber filed a lawsuit to eliminate that funding source too. This is only 12 days before the election, with very little time left to let voters know what their votes will really mean to the health care of 17,000 Maine families and about 700 small Maine businesses. If the Chamber has its way, a Yes vote on One could truly mean the end of Dirigo and the end of quality, affordable health care to the thousands of people who depend on it.

The Chamber, along with the Maine Automobile Dealers Association (MADA) and Maine Association of Health Plans (MEAHP) filed the lawsuit in Kennebec County Superior Court October 23rd. They are asking the court to overturn the decision by the Superintendent of Insurance regarding funding for Dirigo and find the entire funding mechanism for Dirigo unconstitutional. The Superintendent decided last month that the Dirigo Health Program and its many reforms saved the state at least \$48.7 million in 2007. Through the process called the “savings offset payment”, those savings were passed to insurance companies and self-insured companies and those companies are supposed to forward that money to the state to continue funding Dirigo. If this lawsuit is successful, those companies will be allowed to just pocket the savings—money that was never intended for them to keep. They will have increased profits at the expense of the health of the thousands of residents that count on Dirigo for coverage.

With the cost of health care rising five times faster than our paychecks here in Maine we need to help our small businesses and hard working families find ways to pay the bills. We should not be trying to remove measures that are in place to help them. More than 50% of the families claiming bankruptcy are doing so because of overwhelming medical costs. Consumers for Affordable Health Care is hoping that the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, in all of its efforts to take away the insurance for some of its members and thousands of others, does not force more Maine Families into this category.

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For more information or to schedule interviews contact:

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