

# Health Coverage for Maine

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## PRESS STATEMENT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** August 18, 2008

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### Statement of Gordon Smith

Executive Vice President, Maine Medical Association, on behalf of Health Coverage for Maine

#### Responding to the August 18<sup>th</sup> Announcement by Secretary of State Dunlap Regarding Validity of Signatures on Beverage Petition

### Maine People Won't Support Breakdown of Health Coverage System

Pennies on Beer, Wine, and Soda Offer Reasonable Solution to  
Maintaining Health Coverage for Kids and Adults

Today's announcement by Secretary of State Dunlap regarding the validity of the Beverage Petition signatures is disappointing but not unexpected. Let's face it, this effort was initiated by the deep pockets of the beer and soda industries. They bought a Maine ballot question by bringing in paid out-of-state signature gatherers who relied on scare tactics and lies? Misinformation to rack up signatures.

What lies ahead for those deep pockets is undoubtedly an expensive media blitz designed to heighten anxiety by playing off the real challenges Maine people face in making ends meet in this struggling economy. But in a difficult economy, the biggest threat to Maine people isn't a few pennies on beer, wine, and soda, it's losing health coverage. Health insurance coverage is key to healthy kids and healthy businesses. When kids get preventative care to make them healthier, and when businesses can count on healthy employees, health costs go down and Maine's economy can be in a position to thrive.

That's why Maine doctors are solidly opposed to all efforts, including this one, which would put health coverage for children and adults at risk. The 2000 physicians of the Maine Medical Association oppose this shortsighted effort that jeopardizes affordable coverage for over 50,000 Maine people (that's more than the populations of Bangor and Saco combined) and destabilizes the health coverage system Maine is successfully building. And that's why we're confident Maine voters will reject this attempt to protect beer and soda profits at the expense of jeopardizing Maine's health coverage system. Maine is one of the few states that has lowered its rate of uninsured citizens in recent years. We need to build on that success, not take coverage away from families and small businesses.

We continue to have serious concerns about the methods used by the paid signature gatherers, especially in light of the fact that one out of four of the signatures they turned in has not been validated. Stories abound of out-of-state gatherers not following the collection rules and offering false information to voters to get their signatures. We look forward to seeing the petitions ourselves but recognize that, unfortunately, there are no rules against lying. Nonetheless, we are confident that when Maine voters have accurate information about the serious effects of this proposal on children and hard-working adults, they will say 'no thanks'.

A few pennies on beer, wine, and soda is a reasonable solution to prevent Maine children and hard-working adults from losing their health coverage. ▽

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