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Mainers Appalled at Latest Anthem Rate Hike Request

Superintendent is Holding Third and Last Public Hearing on the Request

(Augusta) Maine people who hold Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance plans are speaking out as the third and last public hearing is about to begin on whether the insurer should be allowed to increase its rates yet again. The Superintendent of Insurance already held two public hearings. The first was in Orono last week, the second was in Portland Tuesday, and the third will be in **Gardiner Thursday March 12 at 9:00 am in the Central Conference Room of the Department of Professional & Financial Regulation Building at 122 Northern Avenue.**

“People need to pay attention to this and take action! We can’t stand back and keep letting this happen to us over and over again. We’ve got to stop and say, ‘whoa this is enough!’” says Carol Coffin of Thorndike.

Coffin is reacting to Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield’s latest request to the Superintendent of Insurance to increase its rates again. Anthem is asking Superintendent, Mila Kofman, to allow them to charge an average of 18% more for their HealthChoice and Lumenos insurance products. They are asking for more than a 9% increase on some products and up to nearly a 38% increase on other products.

“We’ve been hit with rate increase after rate increase every year-- and huge rate increases! We just had to increase our deductible to \$10,000 just to afford the last rate increases. And because of the economy our income has not increased, it’s decreased significantly. We don’t know how we’re going to afford another rate increase if it’s approved,” says Anthem policyholder Margaret DaRos of Harpswell.

These increases will affect more than 12,000 Maine policyholders. “The cost of health insurance in the State of Maine is a huge travesty. It is bankrupting families and businesses. I strongly urge the state to deny this request for a rate increase. Why should anthem profit in these hard economic times at the expense of Maine’s struggling businesses, non-profits and residents?” says Debbey Schilder of Appleton.

The last time Anthem was awarded double digit increases they claimed it was to cover the cost of rising health care, but the very next year their profits doubled. Anthem profits grew at astronomical rates in Maine from about \$20 million in 2001 all the way up to \$75 million in 2007. Anthem made nearly \$51 million in profits for 2008 (You can view Anthem rate report here: http://www.maine.gov/pfr/insurance/consumer/excel/2008_rule_945/Anthem_Final_Rule945.xls). As Maine’s largest insurance company Anthem is a monopoly and should be regulated more closely because typical market forces are not working as things stand now. **We want to see the proof that this latest rate hike request is to cover the cost of health care and not to line CEO's pockets.**

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"With the American and Maine economies in tatters, it is unconscionable that Anthem is asking for these types of rate hikes. With so many hard working Maine people losing their employer sponsored coverage it is not fair or right to be asking for double digit increases. If we're ever to fix our economy, we need to fix insure more people and fix our health care system—not drive people out of it. If approved, these increases will do exactly that—drive more Maine families into the ranks of the uninsured," says Consumers for Affordable Health Care Government Affairs Director, Doug Clopp.

People who can't attend the hearing but still want their opinion heard can email comments to Consumers for Affordable Health Care at dclopp@mainecahc.org. We will make sure they are read at the hearing. They can also email Superintendent Mila Kofman directly.

Consumers for Affordable Health Care is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has been helping Maine people get quality, affordable health care for more than 20 years. CAHC collectively represents about 200,000 Maine people.

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