

Good morning! My name is Allen Ewing-Merrill, and I serve as co-pastor of HopeGateWay, which is a United Methodist Church here in Portland. On behalf of my faith leader colleagues who are here with me, and on behalf of the Washington, D.C.-based organization, Faith In Public Life, which helped to organize this event, I want to thank you for being here today.

We're here today to express deep concern about the health care bill now before the Senate; to say clearly that we believe health care is a basic human right, and that as a nation we have a moral responsibility to ensure access to health care; and in particular to urge our own Senator, Susan Collins, whose Portland office is right there, across the street, to oppose a cruel, destructive, and yes, immoral health care bill that promises to harm low-income seniors, children, and people with disabilities.

The Senate bill — a plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, erroneously called the Better Care Reconciliation Act — would decimate Medicaid, affecting major cuts to the Medicaid program and essentially ending the option for Medicaid expansion. Are we okay with that?

This bill would mean low- and middle-income Americans would be required to spend significantly more money for less coverage. Are we okay with that?

This bill would rework the individual market so that enrollees would get less financial help to purchase less generous health insurance with higher deductibles. Are we okay with that?

This bill would defund Planned Parenthood, making it more difficult for low-income women to receive cancer screenings and other preventive care. Are we okay with that?

And let's be clear: This bill promises massive tax breaks for the wealthy, at the expense of the health and well-being of the rest of us! In fact, that's the single top priority of this plan — to benefit the rich, including the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, by cutting health care for everybody else. Are we okay with that?

Although we're still waiting for a CBO score, which will tell us just how devastating this plan would be, already we know that this bill would jeopardize coverage for the 371,000 Mainers who rely on MaineCare, including 63,000 seniors, 132,000 children, and 72,000 with disabilities.

My faith leads me to this conviction: that as a society, we have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that everyone — *everyone* — have access to health care. If you have an ear infection or bronchitis, you need an antibiotic. If you sustain an injury and break a limb, you need medical care that will lead you back to health and strength and mobility. If you have diabetes, you need insulin, consistently. If you receive a devastating diagnosis like cancer, you need access to long-term medical treatment. People in these situations should not have to worry and wonder whether they will have access to care, or whether they will face bankruptcy as a result. We must come to see health care as a basic human right, available to everyone, as it is in every other industrialized country

on earth — not a commodity to be doled out to those who are lucky enough and wealthy enough to be able to afford it, for the benefit of obscene financial profit for insurance companies and the pharmaceutical industry.

One of the primary roles and responsibilities of government is to provide for the common good — and the common good means that we provide compassionate care for the most vulnerable and marginalized of our society. And that's why we are relentless in our pursuit of health care justice for all. In the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all of us indirectly." The decisions Senator Collins and her colleagues will make as they consider this health care bill will affect not only those who lose the most; they will affect all of us.

Rev. Dr. King also said, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhuman... I see no alternative to direct action and creative nonviolence to raise the conscience of the nation." Those are powerful and challenging words that call us as people of faith to stand together to stop this harmful legislation.

Today Senator Collins and her colleagues must answer a question with profound moral and ethical implications: Whom do you serve? Do you serve all God's children, or do you serve only millionaires and powerful special interests? If you serve the people, you will reject this bill, and you will support only legislation that increases access to healthcare. That's it!

So today, our message is clear: Senator Collins! Listen to the people of Maine! Let's send that message right now. I invite you to repeat after me:

Senator Collins!

We are watching!

Listen to the people of Maine!

Health care matters!

Medicaid matters!

Everyone matters!

Health care matters!

Medicaid matters!

Everyone matters!

We will not be silent!

We won't back down!

We're in this until the end!

There are a few more speakers, but first I want to say this: Before you leave, please sign the moral declaration to protect health care! We will be delivering this declaration to the Senator's office at the conclusion of our gathering.

What do we want? Affordable health care for all! When do we want it? Now!