

# AS APPROVED BY THE DELEGATES TO THE VERMONT-NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 7, 2018

The members of Vermont-NEA propose the creation of a statewide health care commission that will design and administer health benefits for all of Vermont's public school employees. The commission will ensure, at a minimum, that the following objectives are achieved:

- It will design, manage, and offer to all school employees a health benefit plan that is comprehensive, affordable, and equitable.
- It will establish full equality in its governance structures and operational procedures between representatives of school boards and Vermont-NEA representatives of school employees.
- It will facilitate the transition of school employees' health benefits to a new system in such a manner that avoids further chaos in the system, is fully transparent, and responds immediately and effectively to concerns or problems arising from the transition.
- It will vigorously research and foster the implementation of rational health care cost control opportunities and ways to achieve a more efficient, patient-centric, health care system.
- It will recognize that the majority of school employees are women and not exacerbate the already unacceptable compensation gap between educational employees and other more male-dominated professions.

Rationale:

Since 2015, VEHI has been an employer-dominated entity, not a partnership of equals.

Consequently, in 2016, Vermont-NEA members petitioned their union to advocate for giving school employees and their families an equal voice on VEHI's Board of Directors, or, at the very least, to urge the VEHI Board to adopt consensus decision-making.

Moreover, the petition said, if "VEHI is not responsive to this request or its efforts to achieve them fail," Vermont-NEA should "explore alternative ways of obtaining health coverage for its active members, retired teachers, and their families."

The VEHI Board, unfortunately, was "not responsive" to the petition's request. In fact, a motion by Vermont-NEA's Executive Director Jeff Fannon that would have committed the VEHI Board to make decisions by consensus, as it had for most of VEHI's existence, failed for lack of a second.

The Governor and the Vermont School Boards' Association (VSBA), since the spring of 2017, have asserted that school boards cannot negotiate or effectively manage health plans for teacher and support staff employees because health care has become "too complex." Instead, the Governor and VSBA have sought to remove health insurance benefits from collective bargaining at the local level, substituting for it an unspecified statewide bargaining process. But their statewide bargaining initiative would preserve the gross imbalance of power to the advantage of school boards on the VEHI Board of Directors, and, to

date, has not concretely addressed how to achieve income sensitivity in the allocation of costs by employees for health insurance or how to make health care more affordable and financially sustainable.

Vermont-NEA's members and their families must no longer be denied an equal voice in the determination of benefits so vital to their welfare and economic security as health insurance, including, critically, the matter of plan design and cost-sharing. Nor can we accept any longer the widespread and harmful disparities in health insurance coverage and costs among public school employees. Therefore, we, the members of Vermont-NEA, believe there must be a fundamental change in how health insurance benefits are designed and managed on behalf of public school employees.

We are in agreement, too, that the statewide health care commission referenced above must play a major role in identifying and pursuing solutions to the systemic and institutional problems that are responsible for ever-rising health care costs and denial of access to high-quality, affordable care for all Vermonters.

Finally, we are steadfast in our conviction that prior to creating a statewide healthcare commission, there must be a written agreement that this commission, from its inception, will operate strictly in accordance with the governance, operational, coverage, and benefit objectives listed on the first page of this new business item.

If such an agreement is reached, we, the members of Vermont-NEA, endorse the creation of a statewide health care commission that equally represents school employees and school boards and that delivers affordable, high-quality health benefits to all public school employees and their dependents.