

VERMONT-NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE

For Information:

Darren Allen

802.224.2403 (office)

802.839.8618 (mobile)

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For Immediate Release

Vermont-NEA Proposes Statewide Commission in Push to Repair Broken Public School Employee Health Insurance System

Delegates to union's annual meeting unanimously approved new path forward

MONTPELIER – The state's largest union is pushing for the creation of a statewide health care commission to design and administer health benefits for all of Vermont's public school employees.

After a unanimous vote by delegates to Vermont-NEA's annual meeting over the weekend, the union is advocating for a return of equity, predictability, affordability, and transparency in the health insurance covering nearly 40,000 Vermonters.

"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," said Martha Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan who serves as president of the 14,000-member union. "Nor can we accept any longer the widespread and harmful disparities in health insurance coverage and costs among public school employees."

Since 2015, Vermont-NEA members have been afforded a minority – now a single seat – on the board of the Vermont Education Health Initiative board of directors, leaving the once consensus-driven entity now completely employer-dominated. Vermont-NEA wants an equal voice at the health insurance table, in part to ensure that this year's chaos with the implementation of new plans is avoided in the future.

Coupled with last year's proposal by the Vermont School Boards Association and Gov. Phil Scott to strip local school boards of their ability to negotiate directly with their local educators over health insurance, Vermont-NEA has taken this step to give school employees a greater voice in their health care.

“We recognize the fundamental shift a statewide health care commission is in our relationship with local school boards,” Allen said. “But it is clear that unless our members have the opportunity to work as equals with school boards in determining their health benefits, and unless strong reform measures are pursued and achieved by school employees and school boards to bring down the irrationally high costs of health care, Vermont’s public school employees will continue to see health care become less affordable.”

In the measure passed by delegates to the union’s annual meeting, a statewide health benefits commission will ensure that the following objectives are achieved:

- It will design, manage, and offer to all school employees a health benefit plan that is comprehensive, affordable, equitable and based on an employee’s ability to pay.
- 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.

“We encourage legislative leaders and the governor to work with us in establishing this commission over the coming weeks,” Allen said. “The governor has said he wants health insurance for public school employees determined at the state level, and we hope he will see this proposal as the right way to design and implement plans that do right by the women and men who teach our state’s children.”

[You can read an outline of the union’s proposal and more details here.](#)

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