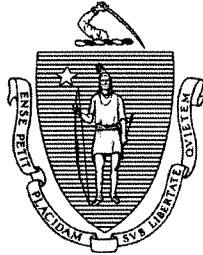


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# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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## JOURNAL OF THE SENATE



### *Senator Benjamin B. Downing's Maiden Speech*

I rise today in support of H. 2601, an act to allow municipalities the option to buy their health insurance through the Group Insurance Commission.

Filed by Senator Moore, endorsed by the Governor, and reported favorably out of the Public Service committee, this legislation is a vital first step to controlling municipal health care costs

In recent years, this body has taken major steps to put our Commonwealth on the path to universal, affordable health insurance. Now we have a chance to tackle the rising cost of health care. Madame President, it's an opportunity we cannot afford to miss. We cannot afford to miss it because municipal costs are soaring and there is a better way.

Currently, municipal health care costs, per employee, are double those of state employees. For 2008, while all other Massachusetts employers will see their health care rates rise 11.3%, the GIC's rates will rise only 5.04%. At the same time, the GIC offers high quality, comprehensive plans, which in most cases are more diverse than those offered by municipalities.

The GIC has a proven track record of providing high quality, cost effective health insurance. 286,000 state employees, including all of my distinguished colleagues and their staff are currently enrolled in the GIC. The city of Springfield joined the GIC last year and has already seen results.

Were all of our communities to follow Springfield's lead, we could save \$120-180 million annually. That's real money that could be redirected to other priorities. If the City of Boston were in the GIC in 2006 they would have saved \$6 million. \$6 million in Boston would mean 85 new police officers, to help the Mayor and Commissioner tackle gang violence and 92 new teachers in our classrooms, to help Superintendent Johnson provide high quality educational opportunities to our capital's children. And while not every community would save that much, every community should have the option. Even smaller communities are looking at the GIC. The City Council of my hometown, Pittsfield, endorsed this proposal on March 27<sup>th</sup>.

The case for the GIC is clear and the time is now. I applaud Chairman Moore, Representative Kaprilean and the rest of the coalition that crafted this legislation. Their work produced a consensus result that will benefit all. They did not produce perfection, but we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Too often, contentious debates, focus on what we need to do more of, or less of, and we miss the most important question – How can we do better? This proposal answers that question and for that reason, it deserves all of our support.

TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2007

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