

NEWS RELEASE

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VPIRG Rates Initial Implementation of Catamount Health Calls on Governor for Stronger Leadership and Further Reform

MONTPELIER – The Vermont Public Interest Research Group issued a scorecard today that gives the Douglas Administration positive marks for the overall development and initial implementation of Catamount Health, a new health insurance plan for uninsured Vermonters.

The report, entitled *Scoring Catamount Health: Examining Vermont's Progress Toward an Equitable Health System*, gives the Administration an overall grade of B for its performance since the passage of the Health Care Affordability Act, the landmark 2006 legislation that established the Catamount Health plan.

The scorecard grades the Administration's work in five key areas: 1) the inclusiveness of the implementation process; 2) messaging and marketing; 3) timeliness and efficiency; 4) the overall fiscal stability of Catamount funding; and 5) the Administration's regulation of the insurance companies who will be selling the Catamount product. The report praises the Office of Health Care Reform for its role in bringing key stakeholders into the process.

"To its credit, the Administration has installed very competent individuals to lead the Catamount Health program," said Stefanie Sidortsova, VPIRG's health care advocate. "This is a good sign for Vermonters who need comprehensive health coverage and have not had access to it."

The scorecard does note a few setbacks in the implementation process, including attempts by the Governor to raid the Catamount Fund and the Administration's internal confusion over Catamount Health's October 1 start date.

"What we must see going forward," said Sidortsova, "is stronger leadership from the Governor to make high quality health care affordable to all Vermonters. Even if Catamount Health meets all of its stated goals, it will do little to make health care more affordable for many thousands of Vermonters who already have some form of insurance."

Earlier in the week, the Health Care Reform Commission voted unanimously on recommendations for further reform in the upcoming legislative session, including a plan to make health care more affordable for Vermont's small business community.

“The Commission’s bi-partisan vote is powerful evidence that Catamount, by itself, is not the solution to Vermont’s health care needs,” Sidortsova stated. “There are thousands of Vermonters who technically have health coverage, but still cannot afford to go to the doctor. It will be critical for Governor Douglas to step up to the challenge of building on the initial success of Catamount’s implementation by providing more Vermonters with access to quality, affordable health care.”

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