



PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wisconsin Health Consumers Shortchanged by Insurance Commissioner

Insurance insiders dominate Exchange working groups

Madison, WI – Identifying yet another “dropped ball” by Wisconsin’s Commissioner of Insurance, two consumer advocacy groups are calling Commissioner Ted Nickel’s newly identified membership of the health insurance exchange work groups unacceptable. Under the Affordable Care Act, states are required to establish health insurance exchanges as an important tool for consumers of all abilities to get health insurance and certain Medicaid/BadgerCare Plus services. To help plan and build the exchange, the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI) yesterday announced the new “[working groups](#)” composed overwhelmingly of insurance industry insiders with token consumer representation.

In one instance, Commissioner Ted Nickel appointed a representative of the State Bar of Wisconsin as the consumer advocate, in essence, calling the bar association a “consumer group.” Bobby Peterson, Public Interest Lawyer at ABC for Health said, “OCI under the leadership of industry insiders, Ted Nickel and Dan Schwartzer have badly fumbled an opportunity to reach out and include consumers in a meaningful way. The lack of representation from the aging, disability groups or child advocacy networks ‘stacks the deck’ for the insurance industry.”

Robert Kraig, Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin commented, “Wisconsin’s health care exchange must be transparent to fully engage consumer trust and confidence. Unfortunately, under Insurance Commissioner Nickel, the public has been largely excluded from the planning process.” As proposed, the badly lopsided committees have 19 different industry representatives and 24 other business associations, while including only 2 people that actually work for a consumer advocacy organization. “That is unacceptable. While appointments of consumer representatives David Riemer and Debra Kraft from Community Advocates are moves in the right direction, the lack of other consumer groups to help build the exchange is pathetic,” concludes Peterson.

[Citizen Action of Wisconsin](#) and [ABC for Health](#) call on Commissioner Ted Nickel to go back to the drawing board. An exchange built without meaningful consumer input on rights and protections will do nothing to help consumers and it is no substitute for a strong health plan marketplace that supports consumers in their decisions. Wisconsin can promote an effective public and private partnership of an insurance exchange that supports the interests of consumers while at the same time helping the industry market cost effective plans to consumers and small business.

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