



**HAV Press Conference
February 25, 2010**

Health Cuts are Bad for Virginia

I am Ali Faruk, from the Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

Budgets reveal priorities, especially in lean economic times. Just like many of Virginia's families who have to make tough decisions, the Commonwealth has to decide what is most important. Do we protect health care for kids and pregnant women? Or do we give tax money to Hollywood movie makers and open government offices in India, China and the UK? Do we protect health care for elderly and the disabled, or do we re-open rest stops across the Commonwealth?

The proposed cuts to health and human services are bad for our state. Virginia is one of the 10 wealthiest states in the country, has been voted the best state for business and the best managed state. Yet, we still fall far short of other states in providing access for all Virginians to affordable health coverage. Even before these cuts, our Medicaid program was one of the least generous in the nation. We are 48th in per-capita Medicaid expenditures and 44th in Medicaid income eligibility for parents.

We fare only slightly better for children, as our income eligibility in FAMIS is lower than 42 other states. If eligibility in FAMIS is reduced as proposed in the House budget, we will have lower eligibility standards than 49 states and the District of Columbia. This is not the type of program that a wealthy state can be proud of. In health care, we just do not live up to our potential.

Even those Virginians who get their insurance at work are feeling the strain. Virginia workers pay the highest percentage of the premium in the country for individual, employer-provided insurance coverage. The trends show that fewer Virginians are even getting health coverage at work. We cannot continue to weaken our public health programs that provide protection to those that lose or cannot access health insurance at work.