

Health Care Expansion Becomes Law in Suffolk County

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Contact Information:

Paul Sonn, 917 566-0680

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New law protects employees, responsible businesses and taxpayers

Suffolk County, NY — Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy on Friday signed into law the “Fair Share for Health Care Act” — a new local law to ensure that large supermarkets and “big box” retailers in Suffolk County help pay their employees’ health care costs. The new law marks a response by communities to eroding employer health care and the resulting costs for taxpayers as the uninsured turn to safety net programs for care. New York City recently adopted a similar law, and lawmakers are considering proposals in Maryland, New Jersey and San Francisco.

The new Suffolk law — supported by Gristedes, Pathmark and other industry leaders — requires supermarkets and “big box” retailers that sell groceries to spend at least \$3.00 per hour on employee health care costs. Most supermarkets in the New York area currently contribute at that rate. It aims to ensure that workers at large supermarkets, most of whom currently receive some form of health care, do not see their coverage taken away in an industry-wide race to the bottom.

“Suffolk’s Fair Share for Health Care Act is a practical response to the costs that low-wage, no-benefits jobs impose on our communities,” said Paul Sonn, Deputy Director of the Poverty Program at the Brennan Center. “I think we’ll see more cities and states following Suffolk’s lead.”

“Passing the law is a huge victory for taxpayers, workers and businesses that already take the high road,” said Brian Schneck, chair of the Suffolk County Working Families Party. By one estimate, the county spends up to \$25 million each year on Medicaid services for employees and families of food retailers that do not provide health care.

The Brennan Center for Justice advised Suffolk County in designing the new law and has been assisting policymakers on similar legislation in other communities. The new law was supported by major supermarket employers and enacted through a campaign led by the Working Families Party and Long Island Jobs with Justice.