

## The Case for Measure A

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

While I was recently celebrating the day of remembrance for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I was struck by the importance of this particular quote and how timely it is for the people of Alameda County. In a time where prosperity is great, Dr. King reminds us that inequity still haunts our progress and that true progress isn't made if it only benefits the few and not the many. Such is true for the poorest of Alameda County and their reliance on what we commonly call the "safety net." The net is unraveling for some faster than others and we have an opportunity to help weave it back together by passing Measure A on the March ballot. Alameda County has been forced to close 3 health care clinics in the past 2 years. These clinics are the ones most often used by people with little or no health insurance. Since 1990, Californians have lost 44 public hospitals that used to provide quality health care services. These are permanent changes.

Measure A, The Essential Health Care Services Tax, is an initiative on the March 2nd ballot that will avoid drastic cuts to local hospitals and clinics and insure access to quality health care for all Alameda County residents if it passes.

### **Specifically, Measure A will:**

- Preserve trauma and emergency services throughout Alameda County;
- Sustain essential primary care, preventative care and mental health services;
- Maintain pediatric emergency services at Children's Hospital;
- Provide primary care for low-income/uninsured children;
- Retain qualified and experienced nurses and health care professionals; and
- Provide pre-natal and family planning services to low-income women.

Alameda County's health care system is in crisis. As more residents lose their jobs and their health insurance, uninsured children and families use emergency rooms for primary medical care. As a result, emergency rooms in all Alameda County hospitals are severely overcrowded. This affects us all and the quality of emergency services we receive. The rapidly growing number of uninsured patients combined with significant reductions in state and federal funding has forced the Board of Supervisors to slash quality health care services throughout the County.

Without additional revenue, County clinics serving low-income children and families will close, trauma and emergency services will be reduced, psychiatric and mental health services will be cut. In better years, local government was able to secure relief through in Sacramento. Unfortunately, our new Governor is more foe than friend, and in his most recent budget proposal shifts substantial funds away from local government. Many public hospitals and health systems are known as "open-door providers" because their purpose is to serve everyone. Since the County serves a patient population that is primarily low

income, publicly insured, or uninsured, running our public hospital is not a money making endeavor, in fact, it is a losing proposition. However, members of the Board of Supervisors and I believe that health care is a right, not a privilege, so we continue to do our part to fund the safety net; we continue to do so with dwindling resources. But now we find ourselves needing help.

**County health care services affect all Alameda County residents.** Keeping public hospitals and clinics open and adequately funded will not only benefit the more than 125,000 patients the Alameda County Medical Center serves each year. It will also help prevent severe overcrowding in public *and* private hospital emergency rooms from Fremont's Washington Hospital to Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley. Without adequate funding, County patients will be forced to seek emergency care outside of the County system. Every Alameda County resident will be affected. I often receive letters from thankful family members of accident victims whose lives were saved by our trauma center. Unfortunately, accidents happen to all of us- the insured and uninsured alike. At places like the Alameda County Medical Center, hundreds of patients, regardless of insurance status are moved from a comatose, critical condition in the Intensive Care Unit, to an individual capable of purposeful movement, ready for rehabilitation.

Measure A is a carefully crafted plan to address the most essential healthcare needs throughout Alameda County. Measure A is supported by doctors, nurses, the Alameda County Taxpayers Association, all five Alameda County Supervisors, business leaders, seniors and other residents of Alameda County. Please join me on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and vote Yes on Measure A. If you are interested in participating on the Measure A Campaign, please e-mail [MeasureA2004@yahoo.com](mailto:MeasureA2004@yahoo.com) or come by the campaign office at 2135 Broadway in Downtown Oakland.