

[By Tim Johnson](#)

College graduates' transition to independent life is daunting enough, especially at a time of high unemployment, but at least now they have one less thing to worry about: buying health insurance.

That's because federal health care reform legislation enacted last year makes it possible for young adults to remain on their parents' health insurance plans until age 26.

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., held a brief news conference at the University of Vermont on Tuesday morning to highlight this benefit, which he called one of the most popular provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act. The act passed Congress last year without Republican support, and it faces challenges from multiple lawsuits. Welch and other Democrats have worked to point Americans toward provisions of the law that should prove popular with many of them.

Welch said the law gives college graduates access to affordable coverage that they would not otherwise have as they search for employment or take entry-level jobs that don't offer benefits or don't pay enough to cover the cost of health insurance. And it's popular among parents, he said, because it offers "peace of mind."

Supporting testimony came from Isaac Loeb, a UVM senior who said he plans to stay on his parents' health plan after he graduates, and Susyn Dees, a parent from Essex Junction, who has a son who's benefiting.

Loeb noted that graduates face enough anxiety -- where to live, finding employment -- without having to worry about health insurance. Because he'll be covered, he's free to seek an entry-level job that dovetails with his career plans, he said.

"I don't have to worry if I get sick," he said. "A sense of security is really nice."

Dees said she had one son, a 27-year-old, who was uninsured and who ran up a \$10,000 hospital bill after an accident. Meanwhile, a younger son who recently graduated has coverage under the new law -- coverage he couldn't have gotten as part of the two minimum-wage jobs he holds down.

"This is a really big step for parents and for graduates who unfortunately don't get jobs like we did starting out," she said.

Undergraduates typically have the option of staying on their parents' health plans while in school or buying insurance offered by the institution.

Welch said about 30 percent of the nation's 45 million people without health insurance are young adults. About 60 percent of the uninsured cite the high cost as a reason why they don't have coverage, he said.

He expressed confidence that the health care law would withstand opposition from Republicans in the House, who voted to repeal the measure.

"I think we'll be able to defend it," he said of the young-adult coverage provision. "It's extremely popular."

Also appearing with Welch to endorse the measure were Cassandra Gekas, Vermont Public Interest Research Group's health care advocate, and Robert Williams, an anesthesiologist at Fletcher Allen Health Care. Their support was echoed by graduating seniors elsewhere on UVM's campus.

"It's awesome that I don't have to pay for it or deal with getting it," said Stephen Yorke, on his way to the Bailey Howe Library on Tuesday morning. He said he hasn't started looking for a job yet and plans to stay on his father's insurance plan.

Another student, Ian Early, said he hoped to get a job in New York that would provide insurance. "I want to get off my parents' health insurance as soon as I can," he said, but added: "It's great to have a safety net."