

Families USA

2015 Consumer Health Advocate Award

Remarks - Leni Preston, Chair, Maryland Women's Coalition for Health Care Reform

I am truly humbled and honored to join an impressive roster of previous awardees - Dizzy, Dede and so many more. I salute them all but given Senator Brown's comment today about "getting in the way" as an advocate I have to mention Elizabeth Benjamin - she is the only person I know who would have the nerve to practically knock down Secretary Sebelius to make yet another pitch for the BHP. My own success with the Secretary - albeit on a different scale - was that she admired my shoes and joined us at an event in Baltimore!

I want to first thank Families USA - not only for this amazing award - but also for the assistance that their team provides day in and day out. I suspect that when an email arrives from me they groan and toss a coin to see who has the nerve to open it and respond! But, respond they do and within hours I have the information I need - thank you!

I have to give thanks, too, to my family - my husband Ned - who keeps the laundry from piling up, the refrigerator filled, and the dog walked And to my daughters - Erica and Caroline - you continually inspire me to be better than I am. Thank you for coming.

I also want to be abundantly clear - I recognize this award belongs to all those who have been at the core of the Coalition's work since 2006. We have gone from being "just another women's organization" to being "a

model for other states." And, today, it is our "brain trust" that has allowed me to receive this recognition of our work. Very special thanks to our current Steering Committee members - Leigh Cobb, Adrienne Ellis, Mary Lou Fox, Debra Hickman, Ellen Weber and Susan Wood; to our consulting team of Zenobia Taylor-Weiss, and Linda Rittelmann and special thanks to Robyn Elliott, Wendy Frosh and to our network of partners and advocates across the State. With them we manage to have representation on 22 committees and workgroups and to respond to the deluge of proposed regulations that drop into our in-box. And, we never lose the opportunity to put consumer advocate into the mouths of our elected officials. Speaking of which, you may have heard we have a new Governor - so we look forward to the opportunities and challenges to come.

None of this would be possible without our national partners - Not only Families but also Cindy Pearson and the National Women's Health Network - our fiscal sponsor should you be thinking of making a donation!!! Lois Uttley, Byllie Avery and everyone with Raising Women's Voices; Community Catalyst; Lynn Quincy, the Consumers Union team, Dave Chandra at CBPP, Mara Youdelman & NHelp, the National Women's Law Center and so many more across the country - you are the heart and soul of our advocacy efforts & your knowledge and expertise make it possible for us to be as successful as we are.

Since 2006 when the Coalition formed and when I left the museum field, friends have asked why? Why give up "retirement" to work endless hours, drive countless miles, to say nothing of learning a new language and all as a volunteer. I will save you the personal reasons for that, but lay credit at the feet of John Kerry. Ned and I moved out of voiceless and vote-less DC

during the 2004 primary season and once the boxes were unpacked we became involved in the election. That did present some challenges at the time because my mother and I didn't see eye to eye on politics so I had to park the car so that she wouldn't see my bumper stickers.

When, two years later I was asked to join the fledgling Coalition, I thought the invitation was a joke. After all, for me, AMA stood for the American Museum Association. But as Will Rogers said - "You have to go out on a limb sometimes because that's where the fruit is" ... For me the fruit has been abundant and delicious ... and I thank all of you for that.

So, bear with me just one more moment because I have to share my favorite reform story - with apologies to those who have heard it. Shortly after President Obama signed the ACA the Coalition adopted the slogan - Health Care. Get It. We had pins made up and the first time I wore it I was in a gas station when a rather dubious looking gentleman came up to me and said, "Where do I get it?" For a brief moment I she 40+ years and was speechless until reality set in and I said, "Get what?" He looked at me as if I had lost my mind and said "Get health care!" Of course, then we didn't have the Exchange so I had no easy answer. Today we do - and I just hope that the nine justices who reside not far from here "get it!"

With a nod to the great philosopher, Garrison Keillor and with thanks to Senator Brown for his comment that we should "make good trouble always" I want to close by saying - "Be Good (but not too good), Do Great Work, and Let's Stay in Touch - THANK YOU!