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## **Grocery Workers, Faith and Community Leaders Highlight Struggles Of Working Mothers At Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons**

### **20,000 Fewer Children Covered Compared to Three Years Ago**

### **Huge Drop in Employer-Based Health Coverage Hurts Families, Taxpayers**

Los Angeles—Clergy, children's advocates, nurses and community leaders held a press conference today calling on Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons to honor Mother's Day by restoring health care coverage to tens of thousands of grocery workers and their children.

"Increasingly, mothers are working full time but struggle to provide basic necessities like health insurance for their family," said Rev. Anna Olson of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). "The strain mothers feel has deep consequences for children, and ultimately for our communities. But the crisis for working mothers and their families is not inevitable. It has come about because of choices made by large corporations—like Albertsons, Ralph and Vons—and ultimately the choices we make as a society."

Despite high profits, Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons have dramatically slashed health care coverage for their workers. A study released earlier this year by the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education found a startling 40 percent drop in health care coverage for unionized Southern California grocery workers over a three-year period.

The report shows that as of September 2006, only 54 percent of union grocery workers in Southern California had health coverage through their employer, compared to 94 percent in September 2003. Coverage for workers hired under the two-tier contract imposed by employers in 2004 has fallen even more precipitously. Ninety-three percent of new hires do not receive health care through their employer.

The UC report also documents steep declines in coverage for children and spouses of grocery workers. In September 2003, 64,389 children of unionized grocery workers were covered in Southern California. By September 2006, that number had fallen by more than 20,000 to 43,572—a 32 percent decline. Spousal coverage went from 33,269 to 23,162 in the same period.

"For two and half years, my children were not eligible for healthcare coverage," said Suzanne Demers, a Vons employee. "That was two and half years that my husband and I lived in fear every day that my children would get sick and we wouldn't be able to pay for their medicine or that they may have a serious illness or accident and we would lose everything."

"I'm fortunate that my children now have health care coverage, but we had to wait a long time. There are still 20,000 children of grocery workers without health care coverage today, and that has to change."

Rosa Calvario, a Vons employee who has worked in the supermarket industry for 22 years, said if she were starting out she would no longer seek the same career. “These used to be good jobs that allowed us to raise our families. That’s not true anymore, but with the support of the public we can make these good jobs again. The companies must know that the public is behind us,” said Calvario.

Speakers at today’s event called upon Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons to abolish the two-tier system and restore good jobs that sustain families and communities. “Under the current conditions imposed by these corporations, parents must work multiple jobs to make ends meet, leaving them little time to supervise their children’s homework or just be there for them,” said Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. “Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons may have stocked their stores with Mother’s Day bouquets, but that does not make up for mistreating the thousands of mothers who work for them.”

According to the UC report, among workers with a chronic health condition hired under the new contract, 20 percent fewer were receiving treatment as compared to their co-workers who were eligible for the higher tier plan. “Workers without health insurance are more likely to delay needed care and less likely to receive treatment for chronic health conditions. Treatment delays may have long term adverse effects on both health and health costs,” states the report.

Ken Jacobs, co-author of the study and Chair of the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, said, “This report documents the troubling erosion of health care coverage in an industry that for decades has been an important source of middle class employment in Southern California. The decline in job-based coverage has important implications for the public at large. When workers do not have coverage through their job it not only affects workers’ access to care, it also raises costs for those employers who do provide health coverage and for taxpayers.”

Today’s event was organized by the Los Angeles Grocery Workers and Community Health Coalition, an alliance of community, labor and faith-based groups. The Coalition believes that supermarkets which provide good jobs and access to quality food are vital to the health and economic vitality of Los Angeles, and is dedicated to ensuring that the grocery industry continues to be a source of stable, middle-class employment and serves the needs of residents in all parts of the city.

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