

affect you now, but it will soon, and very soon indeed. This proposal is just the beginning for mandating that all employers provide health benefits. Once this precedent is set, the General Assembly will most certainly apply the law to smaller companies in the future while also requiring that more money be spent on health care. Senate Bill 790 on its face appears to be an attempt to address the issue of increasing health care costs. However, an appropriate response to this issue is addressing a long-term solution to determine how to best reduce health care costs. I challenge the members of the General Assembly to stand with me in crafting an appropriate solution.

I am committed to increasing access to quality health care, especially for those Marylanders who can least afford it. As Governor, I have worked earnestly with the General Assembly to ensure affordable health care through Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), prescription drug program modifications, and increased access and improved environments for small group market reform. I have demonstrated my commitment by providing \$2.4 million in the fiscal year 2005 budget to establish a capital bond program to expand and improve FQHCs for five capital projects in Baltimore City, Allegany County, Caroline County, and a center to serve the lower shore. My fiscal year 2006 budget allocated \$2.4 million for seven capital projects located throughout Baltimore City, Allegany County and Prince George's County. A total of almost 38,000 additional patients will be served as a result of these projects. In addition, I have worked closely with the General Assembly this session on a series of health care access and prescription drug bills that directly address the problems we face. I look forward to continuing that productive bipartisan relationship to find real solutions. In contrast, Senate Bill 790 does nothing to address the issues of access to or affordability of health care. It is not a health care bill; it is a tax bill.

The chilling anti-business message sent by this bill has been heard by Maryland employers of all sizes and by potential employers of Marylanders around the world. For the above stated reasons, I have vetoed Senate Bill 790.

Very truly yours,
Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.
Governor

Senate Bill No. 790

AN ACT concerning

Fair Share Health Care Fund Act

FOR the purpose of establishing the Fair Share Health Care Fund; establishing the purpose of the Fund; providing that the Fund consists of certain payments made by employers in connection with a certain health care payroll assessment; providing that the Fund is a special, nonlapsing fund; requiring the State Treasurer to hold the Fund and the Comptroller to account for the Fund; requiring that investment earnings of the Fund be retained in the Fund; requiring the interest on and other income from the Fund be separately accounted for; requiring the Fund to be used to support the operations of the