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MO: H/06/02249

Mr Neil Laurie  
The Clerk of the Parliament  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 10 March 2006 on behalf of J Killer regarding a petition received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 629-06. I understand the petitioners are requesting the House to call on the current Government to commit to maintain Queensland's free hospital system and scrap plans for the implementation of levies and means testing for Queensland patients.

There is no doubt, that the Queensland health system is facing many sustainability challenges, including meeting the needs of a growing and ageing population, responding to rapid advances in technology, managing the growing prevalence of chronic and complex conditions and the meeting the ever increasing costs of providing health care.

Concern is mounting that the policy of providing free universal health insurance to all eligible Queenslanders is not sustainable in an environment of rapidly increasing demand and costs.

The Queensland Health Systems Review recommended that Queensland Health explore ways to help ensure the sustainability of public hospital services and improve the safety and timeliness of public surgical services for those least able to afford care.

On 25 October 2005 the Premier announced an Action Plan, including the single biggest financial injection into the health system by any Queensland Government - an extra \$6.4 billion over the next five years. The five-year Action Plan provides a new vision and funding regime for Queensland Health. This funding is providing immediate relief to health services across the State and is providing for the phased implementation of reforms to ensure future sustainability. It will be used to provide more doctors, nurses and allied health staff, maintain and improve hospitals and purchase new technology and equipment.

A key area in the Action Plan was the recruitment of a health economist to investigate options to increase revenue from the services Queensland Health provides. The review looked at the implications of introducing means testing and co-payments for specified services. The options considered in the report are contentious, but it was important that the Government investigate all the possibilities. The Government has now considered the final report from the health economist and has made an official announcement on the options considered in the report.

The Honourable Peter Beattie and myself provided a joint media statement on 29 March 2006 announcing that the public hospital system will remain free for all Queenslanders, regardless of their income or age. The Government has ruled out introducing co-payments and means testing for public patients. We believe we can build the best health system in Australia without means testing or co-payments.

The Government will continue to fund free public health services in a large decentralised state with a health sector characterised by increasing demand and costs arising from an ageing population and advances in technology, service quality and community expectations.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Mr Stuart Dignam, Senior Policy Advisor, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 3234 1191.

Yours sincerely

**STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP**