



Health Care Debate Takes Center Stage in Washington, D.C.

The first major legislative effort of the Republican controlled Congress in Washington, D.C. this year will be the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). Congressional leaders have proposed an extremely aggressive time-frame and have vowed to have bills to the President's desk by the Easter recess. Ending weeks of speculation and secrecy, House GOP leadership unveiled their replacement plan, titled the American Health Care Act, Monday evening that is being considered this week by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. As expected, the plan contains some extremely alarming provisions which would dramatically impact access to health care for children and young adults in Michigan and potentially devastate future Michigan budgets.

Michigan joined 31 other states in expanding access to Medicaid services under the Affordable Care Act. This expansion allowed Michigan to provide Medicaid services to more individuals and was particularly helpful in providing access to health care for young adults, many of whom are parents. Fully one half of all recipients of Medicaid in Michigan are children or young adults aged 19-26 and more than 50% of all births in Michigan are covered by Medicaid.

The House GOP plan would eliminate the Medicaid expansion in 2020 and would implement per capita spending caps on Medicaid moving forward, radically restructuring the Medicaid program. The purpose of a per capita spending cap is to cut federal support to Medicaid. This would dismantle Medicaid's flexible financing structure that has protected Michigan's poorest citizens during economic downturns, or during public health emergencies. And, it will force states like Michigan to either finance the shortfall with state dollars meaning fewer resources to invest in other critical programs that help children and families, or cut health care coverage for vulnerable populations.

Whether you support Obamacare or not, it has become a significant part of our health care system and any efforts to repeal and replace it will impact the access to health care for children and families. The Medicaid program has been around for more than 50 years and is the bedrock of the health care system for those most vulnerable, including low income children, youth and families, but also for children with special needs and children involved in the child welfare system. It has provided access and benefits that have saved countless expenditures for health and mental health care left untreated. At the very least, Congress should commit to "do no harm" to the health insurance coverage upon which our nation's children rely.

Congressional leadership appears insistent to push this through before the general public and all interested parties fully understand the impact of the changes. **Please contact your Congressional members and urge them to slow this process down, schedule congressional hearings to discuss and receive input on these proposals and wait for a full analysis of how the bill would impact coverage rates and support to states' Medicaid programs.** Children deserve better than to have adults in Congress threaten their families' health coverage.

Matt Gillard is the President & CEO of Michigan's Children, the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families.