RE: H.B. 188: Expanding Medicaid Act

From: Kim Gibson

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**H.B. 188: Expanding Medicaid Act to eliminate coverage gaps**

 **Executive Summary:** H.B. 188 (2018), Expand Medicaid Now Act, enact would provide coverage to up to 600,000 Georgians who currently do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot access health insurance through the Affordable Care Act’s Marketplace. Expanding Medicaid in Georgia would mean these individuals would be able to go to the doctor for preventative care and receive protection from large medical bills in a health crisis. H.B. 188 (2018) provides for the authorization of appropriations to obtain federal financial participation for medical assistance payments to providers of Medicaid expansion. To expand Medicaid and bring the positive benefits to Georgia, the state would only pay 10 percent of the cost on the Medicaid expansion while the federal government pays the remaining portion (Georgians for a Healthy Community, 2018).

**Scope of Problem:** Since the Affordable health care act first began in 2013, thousands of Georgians signed up for low-cost health coverage (Georgia Equality, 2018). According to Georgians for a Healthy Community (2018) up to 600,000 Georgians fall into the coverage gap and are unable to get coverage. These Georgians are working parents, low-come employees, and veterans. According to Garfield & Damico (2017) the characteristics of the population that fall into the coverage gaps are poor, uninsured adults. Garfield & Damico (2017) also discuss that racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to fall into the coverage gap and report that the Black population account for a slightly higher share of people in the coverage gap. In addition, they explain that these individuals do not qualify for Medicaid and do not make enough money to get help through the health insurance marketplace. Garfield & Damico (2017) report, nationally, six in ten people in the coverage gap are in a family with a worker and half are working themselves. In fact, they report that 62 percent of Georgians who fall in the gap are in a working family. In addition to low-income and working families, Harker (2018) reports that there are 32,000 uninsured veterans and military spouses in Georgia. Williams (2017) reports that those who are not covered by Medicaid expansion utilize the emergency room rather than seeking preventative care, which has financial implications for their communities. Many Georgia hospitals are struggling financially because of patients who lack health insurance, placing the burden on taxpayers who end up footing the cost of the uninsured people who seek emergency care (Harker, 2018)

**Policy Alternatives:** The current policy under Article 7 of Chapter 4 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia annotated in reference to medical assistance fails to provide authorization of appropriations that would allow for Medicaid expansion in Georgia (Georgians for a Healthy Community, 2018). Medicaid expansion is needed to provide affordable insurance to those who do not meet income eligibility requirements in the low-cost programs.

**Policy Recommendations:** H.B. 188 (2018), Expand Medicaid Now Act; enact provides the opportunity for elected officials to close the coverage gap while strengthening the economy. H.B. 188 (2018) provides for the maximum federal dollars already set aside to provide coverage to those individuals who fall into the coverage gap (Georgia Equality, 2018). Georgians for a Healthy Community (2018) discusses the positive impact for people with private health insurance. In a 2016 analysis they found exchange premiums were an average of seven percent lower for those states who had expanded Medicaid. They describe how individuals who are insured are less likely to seek emergency care and instead go to their doctor for preventative care. Harker (2018) discuss the economic impacts of closing the coverage gap that would extend healthcare coverage to 240,000, supporting hospitals financially and creating 56,000 jobs and increasing the state’s economic output by 6.5 billion dollars annually. The majority of the cost of expanding Medicaid in Georgia will come from federal dollars. Harker (2018) explains that for every dollar the state spends on Medicaid expansion, Georgia receives up to nine dollars in federal funding.

**Conclusion:** H.B. 188 (2018), Expand Medicaid Now Act; enact provides an opportunity to solve the problem of the coverage gap to the poor and uninsured in Georgia while bringing forth economic benefits to private insurance policy holders (Harker, 2018). According to Georgians for a Healthy Community (2018), the affordable health care act provided thousands of Georgians with low-cost coverage for healthcare, however there continues to be a missing link. They report that approximately up to 600,000 Georgians remain uninsured because they fall into the coverage gap. These individuals range from a variety of backgrounds including veterans, low-income households and working parents as identified above. The taxpayers end up paying a share of the medical care that these uninsured people receive in the emergency room (Harker, 2018). H.B. 188 (2018) closes the coverage gap which contributes to individuals seeking medical care through their doctors and reducing costs to taxpayers. Harker (2018) reports that closing the coverage gap would extend coverage to 240,000 Georgians. In addition, by providing Medicaid expansion and insuring the individuals it would result in hospitals and doctors receiving compensation and opening the door to create 56,000 jobs in Georgia while bring in 3 billion dollars from the federal government. Georgia cannot afford to close the door to the benefits to the uninsured and the communities that come with Medicaid expansion. Voting yes to H.B. 188 (2018) is a vote for the hardworking Georgians that need health coverage, the hospitals who are struggling, the taxpayers and the economy of Georgia.

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