



Testimony to the Healthcare Alternatives for Citizens below 100 Percent of Poverty Level.

Good afternoon Chairman Hagedorn, Chairman Loertscher, members of the committee. My name is Jesus Blanco and I am the Policy Associate at Idaho Voices for Children. Thank you for holding this listening session.

Idaho Voices for Children believes that closing the “coverage gap” is the most important policy initiative state lawmakers can undertake to help Idaho’s hard-working families build a bright future for their children. The harsh reality these families face now means they often delay/forego primary care use, and rely on costly visits to emergency rooms to get the care that they need, even for chronic, manageable conditions.

Before joining the staff of Idaho Voices for Children I served as the Director of Policy and Operations for Glens Ferry Health Center (GFHC), a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) serving Elmore County for three and half years. In that role I saw first-hand the negative impacts that NOT having health insurance and limited resources had on patients in the coverage gap.

A trend I saw play out on a daily basis with our uninsured population was the use of our health center only when they were in dire need of care because they already had a large bill and they knew we would ask for payment at their next appointment.

While I can’t share any particular heart breaking patient stories from my time at GFHC due to HIPAA privacy laws, I can tell you that their stories mirror something like what my family faced. As a kid growing up without health insurance in Wilder Idaho, my family was fortunate to have access to primary care services from Terry Reilly’s Homedale clinic on the sliding fee program. To this day, I am grateful to Terry Reilly for being there for my uninsured family throughout my childhood. But, like the countless patients at GFHC in the coverage gap, my family’s only healthcare options were to try to get an appointment at our Health Center, delay care, or go to the emergency room. The ER visits were always financially devastating.

While my memory of the details of my family member's ER visits have faded over time, what I recall clearly are the steep medical bills that we faced afterwards. My parents worked hard, but my family lived paycheck to paycheck so the additional burden of medical debt from the Hospital was a devastating blow that made living day-to-day and delaying preventive health care our reality.

I can tell you from my personal experience and 13 years of working with our state's uninsured population that Idaho families in the coverage gap are working hard to build a future for their children, but getting ahead is extremely difficult for families that continue to be in the unfortunate situation where any illness or medical emergency can erase any progress they've made in an instant.

Members of the Healthcare Alternative Workgroup—I ask, on behalf of Idaho Voices for Children, that you develop a complete solution that provides essential benefits to the 78,000 Idahoans in the gap in a manner that is cost-effective. I hope you will then champion the passage of that solution to the full Legislature in 2017.

Thank you for your time.

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