

Testimony Presented to the House Health & Human Services Committee

March 18, 2015

**by the Right Reverend Dean E. Wolfe
Ninth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas**

HB2319 — State medical assistance program; expansion of eligibility

The Episcopal Diocese of Kansas includes some 11,000 members in 45 congregations, as well as a secondary school and two social service agencies. The diocese covers the eastern 40 percent of the state of Kansas, extending as far west as Abilene and Wichita. It also includes the cities of Topeka, Lawrence, Manhattan and the entire Kansas City metropolitan area on the Kansas side of the state line.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Medicaid expansion. This action is projected to reduce by nearly one-half the number of Kansans currently lacking health care coverage.

We believe that every person is valuable and created in God's image, and therefore deserves the opportunity to live a healthy, dignified life. We seek public policies that ensure every Kansan access to quality affordable health care. We value programs for uninsured individuals and families that provide help finding and enrolling in coverage through the Affordable Care Act and that offer assistance in paying health insurance premiums.

Today we are asking for legislative action that would expand the KanCare program – the state's managed care program – to include individuals earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

Raising the income threshold for the state's medical assistance program, Kansas would receive federal funding to help pay for the cost of expansion. The expansion would close the gap that currently exists between eligibility for KanCare and eligibility for coverage through the Affordable Care Act.

We join with diverse group of stakeholders who advocate for closing the coverage gap and expanding Medicaid. We recognize the burden placed upon hospitals and other providers who care for uninsured, low-income patients. Medicaid expansion is good for the Kansas economy and would provide revenue to medical and nonprofit organizations in our rural and urban communities. It would increase employment in the medical and social service fields; good jobs that will raise both income and sales tax revenue. Expansion would lead to savings from programs we already pay for as a state (such as costs related to prison health care and substance abuse treatment) that would be replaced by federal dollars.

We are aware of suffering by uninsured people too fearful of medical bills to seek services they may urgently need. We cannot afford to overlook the health of thousands of Kansans who lack access to an appropriate level of healthcare services. As people of faith, we accept the responsibility to be both a healing, pastoral presence and a voice of justice for those in need.

We ask that you enact legislation to expand Medicaid access for the most vulnerable among us and to protect the dignity and well-being of God's beloved people.