

Counseling Inc



An individualized counseling experience

March 16, 2015

RE: HB2319

Honorable Chair and Members of this Committee:

My name is Peter Ninemire. I am writing today to support Medicaid Expansion in Kansas from my perspective as the owner operator of a mental health and substance abuse facility in Wichita. In the past 3-plus years since I established my agency, me and my 3 staff members have witnessed many potential patients who suffer from the disease of addiction and mental health whom we have not been able to help because of their lack of affordable healthcare. Most of these folks fall in the gap of making under \$11,000 while others slightly above that are able to gain health insurance. Instead of being able to help these people with longer-term continuity of care, we watch these people inevitably utilize emergency rooms, jails and ultimately prison for their treatment. This is incredibly futile for the patient and costly for the state of Kansas.

Continuity of care between the medical and behavioral health systems is vital, and promoted by the affordable care act. There are 22 million Americans who suffer from a substance dependence disorder, but only 1 million of these people are in treatment. There are some of these individuals in Kansas who will suffer from mental health and substance abuse disorders that cause havoc in our community, and ultimately end up in jail or prison with the disease of addiction, only to come out in worse shape than they went there. A prominent National Institute of Drug Abuse study conducted in 2007 reports that 95% of those who go to prison for drug and alcohol problems, and who do not receive treatment during or after their prison stay, end up relapsing, and 70% go back to prison. The Affordable Care Act provides seamless aftercare after their release with these Medicaid funds. This type of seamless and integrated care would reduce our prison population and provide better outcomes for their future, not to mention relieving pressure on all the state systems. It would also prevent many from going to prison in the first place.

The national Association of State Mental Health Program Directors reports that states cut \$4.35 billion on mental health spending from 2009 to 2012. Expanding Medicaid in Kansas would fill this gap and create a sense of belonging to our community that so many of these folks are missing. Lack of mental

health care has also contributed to some of the most horrific mass murders we have seen across the country in recent years, as a result of some of the 58 million Americans who have a diagnosable mental illness, but don't receive treatment.

On a more personal note, I know the horror of being told that you are being denied when my health insurance was pulled several years ago because I acquired a tick-borne illness that was not considered a pre-existing condition on a new plan when I became self-employed. I wrote several appeals based on numerous tests showing my blood counts returning to normal, and was ultimately reinstated. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, this cannot happen today, but what can happen is a terminally ill person who was in tears on the other end of my phone at my practice telling me how she fell in the gap and could not get or afford healthcare. I offered to provide some therapy but I could not help her with the medical care that was more acutely necessary.

My agency has received countless calls from individuals referred to us for co-occurring treatment in the last couple of years we have not been able to serve because of lack of healthcare that our small agency cannot afford to provide free. As a mental health and substance abuse provider in this state that receives Medicaid reimbursement, I would be honored to have the opportunity to be part of a coalition of providers who have a stipend levied against reimbursement of services to help pay for the 10% government match that is required for the third year of receiving Medicaid funding. This would greatly benefit many low income mostly working class citizens and families who do not presently have health insurance coverage due to lack of Medicaid expansion, as well as my agency who would be honored to serve them and our community. I strongly support House Bill 2319 that is being proposed by the Kansas Hospital Association and/or any version of that would allow us behavioral health providers to help offset the cost of federal reimbursement in the coming years. Thank you for your consideration of the above testimony in support of HB2319 or another version of Medicaid Expansion in Kansas. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further service toward this end.

Sincerely,

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