

House Health and Human Services

Testimony

Fred Benjamin, Chief Operating Officer, Medicalodges, Inc.

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Good Morning Chairman Hawkins, and distinguished members of the committee. I'd like to thank you for holding this hearing on the expansion of Medicaid, and I especially appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today. My name is Fred Benjamin, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Medicalodges, Inc., a company that offers a continuum of health care options which include independent living, skilled nursing home care, rehabilitation, assisted living, specialized care, outpatient therapies, adult day care, in-home services, as well as services and living assistance to those with developmental disabilities.

Medicalodges was launched in 1961 when its first nursing home, Golden Age Lodge, was opened in Coffeyville, Kansas by founding owners Mr. and Mrs. S.A. Hann. The company grew through the 1960's with the addition of eight nursing facilities. In 1969, Golden Age Lodges was renamed Medicalodges, Inc. As new care centers were built or purchased, the company expanded its products and services to include a continuum of health care. In February, 1998 the employees of Medicalodges acquired the company from its previous owners in a 100% Employee Stock Ownership Trust transaction. Today, the company owns and operates over 30 facilities with operations in Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma and employs over 2200 people in the communities it serves. I have served as the Company's Chief Operating Officer since May, 2009. I am honored to have served for 30-years in healthcare, including senior management roles in skilled and sub-acute care, hospitals and other for-profit and not-for-profit ventures. I am also currently serving as Chairman of the Board of the Kansas Health Care Association, the leading provider advocacy group for seniors in Kansas.

In Kansas, approximately 360,000 people are without health insurance. Medicaid expansion is an integral component in making health care coverage available and affordable for all Kansans. Two years into KanCare and we are still seeing coverage gaps. Medicaid expansion will help working Kansans across all ages and demographics. Our workers are the

ones who will benefit from the expansion of the Medicaid. The very areas in Kansas that have the largest numbers of uninsured are also the areas where it is difficult to find workers for the health care system. Expanding Medicaid would create new jobs as the health care system grows. A July, 2014 study by the US Council of Economic Advisors found that States that had already expanded Medicaid added 79,000 new jobs, with projections of 365,000 new jobs by 2017.

We believe a more robust health care system helps all of us. Health coverage means healthier employees and therefore, happier residents. Healthier workers who are less financially stressed are in better mental health and we believe, more likely to participate in the workforce or have higher productivity on the job, economic benefits that would be important over the long run.

As the healthcare system continues to evolve, we are challenged with using all manner of technology; off-site doctor visits, telemedicine being used across the state in rural as well as urban settings. And with the Medicaid more opportunities for care to be delivered in all kinds of settings.

By expanding the Kansas Medicaid program, we can improve access to essential medical care, reduce financial hardship, improve our citizen's mental health and longevity and claim millions of sorely needed dollars in Federal funding that will boost our economy.