

Turner House Children's Clinic

Good afternoon, Chairman Hawkins and members of the committee. I am Janet Burton, Executive Director of Turner House Children's Clinic in Kansas City, Kansas. Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in support of HB 2319.

As you consider and debate the potential impact and opportunity of Medicaid expansion in our state, I'd like to share the impact of Medicaid on Turner House Children's Clinic and its patients. Because 75% of our patients are enrolled in Medicaid, we have been able to increase access to primary health care services; improve quality and health outcomes for our patients, and as a result, reduce health system costs.

Turner House is an independent, nonprofit, pediatric Safety Net clinic, located in the heart of a low-income, working class neighborhood in Kansas City, Kansas. Approximately 85% of our 4500 patients live at 100% or below of the federal poverty level and 75% of patients are enrolled in KanCare Medicaid—a percentage that has grown from 54% over the past four years. Uninsured patients are charged a nominal fee for services. No patient is turned away for inability to pay.

Our families are not the stereotype you might image. While low-income, they are hardworking people, often holding more than one job, while they strive to do the best they can for their families and children. Their families are large. They have limited means of transportation. In many cases, they have limited knowledge of Medicaid, or of how to navigate a health care system. Without access to a medical home primary care safety net clinic like Turner House for their children, families access only emergency rooms for their children's medical care.

When enrolled in Medicaid, our patients gain access to a primary care provider and medical home clinic. As patient families build trusted relationships with our pediatric providers and care teams, they learn the importance of preventive health care, including well-child physicals, developmental screenings, and age-specific immunizations. They bring their children for follow-up appointments instead of avoiding those appointments because of not having money to pay a large bill. As a result, chronic conditions like asthma are brought under control, frequency of contagious childhood diseases is reduced, and the associated high costs of hospitalizations and non-essential emergency room visits are minimized. For example, 80% of Turner House asthmatic patients have reported in follow-up appointments that they have not visited the emergency room in the past three months. Because a Turner House patient visit costs an average of \$200, and a non-admitted hospital emergency room visit costs \$400-\$600, we know Turner House is reducing health system costs—which not only reduce uncompensated care for hospitals, but the costs of care to Medicaid Managed Care Companies and the state.

With the support of KanCare Medicaid, Turner House patients are close to achieving Healthy People 2020 goals for immunizations: 89% of two-year old and adolescent patients are compliant with age-specific immunizations, compared to a Kansas state average of 65%.

KanCare Medicaid reimbursements only cover approximately 40% of the cost of a visit at Turner House. We do not “make money” off of Medicaid, and must receive grants and raise funds to cover the rest of our operating costs. However, the reimbursements we receive from Medicaid have given us a regular source of cash flow which has helped stabilize the clinic’s operating budget. As this has occurred, we have been able to hire and support a staff and payroll of 22 employees, which means we have sustained jobs and returned dollars to the local Wyandotte County and Johnson County communities where our employees work and live, and thus to the state economy. We estimate that revenue received from Medicaid expansion, as more patients became insured, would support the addition of one more staff position, and thus one more new, skilled job to the state of Kansas. We are a small business employer eager to participate in job growth in our state.

There is no shortage of demand for our services. Over the past three years, Turner House has grown 40% in both the number of patients served and the number of patient visits. The need for affordable health care and access to affordable health insurance continues to grow in Wyandotte County where more than 40% of children live in poverty. The face and profile of those who struggle to make ends meet is not what you might think.

While many of our pediatric patients have access to Medicaid, their parents do not. As parents experience health issues, we see children struggle when parents’ health issues destabilize families. For example, we welcomed a newborn patient whose mother was terminally ill with cancer. Her 19 year old daughter gave up her own education when the mother died to take on the responsibility of raising her four siblings. Tragically, had the mother had health insurance and a primary care medical home, her cancer could have been diagnosed in an early stage and her untimely death prevented. Until the daughter became of age and was able to become her siblings’ legal guardian, her siblings were placed in foster care—a further cost to the state.

While 25% of our patients remain uninsured today, we know this number would decrease with Medicaid expansion as families currently in the “donut hole” of earning too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not making enough to afford health insurance would become eligible.

This week, I had the opportunity to speak to Leadership 2000, a group of emerging Leaders in Wyandotte County. One of the participants raised her hand and said, “I want to personally thank Turner House. I know first-hand the quality of their care and the value of their services. I am a single mother with two boys. My employer’s health plan costs too much for me to add my boys to my health insurance. I didn’t know how I was going to pay for my sons’ health care until I learned about Turner House. My sons have been going there for 18 months, and I can’t tell you the difference it has made for both of them.” While Turner House has provided this hardworking mother and emerging Wyandotte County leader with a primary care medical home for her sons, we know her family is at economic risk should one of her sons be in an accident, develop a chronic condition or require hospitalization. Medicaid expansion would provide her with a way to insure her whole family.

I urge you to thoughtfully and reasonably debate HB 2319 and find a way for Medicaid expansion to become a reality in Kansas.