

Written testimony to the Kansas House of Representatives

Committee on Health and Human Services

Rep. Dan Hawkins, Chairman; Rep. Susan Concannon, Co-Chair

By Jay Rowh, Kansas Silver Haired Legislature president

Good afternoon, Chairman Hawkins, Co-Chair Concannon, and members of the Committee. My name is Jay Rowh from Beloit, and I am the Mitchell County representative to the Silver Haired Legislature (SHL). I also am currently the president of that organization.

The Kansas Silver Haired Legislature was established in 1982 by an act of the Kansas Legislature. It is our purpose to advocate for the 500,000 plus Senior Citizens in Kansas who are over the age of 60. Each spring, our eleven regions across the state meet to discuss the issues that are important to the Kansas Seniors in that area. Those issues are then brought before the Executive Board of the SHL in July, where they are reduced in number to the six most important to us. Those six issues are then debated in committee and voted upon by our entire SHL body at our Annual Session in Topeka in the fall. Those issues that receive favorable passage are what we advocate for to the Kansas Legislature during the Kansas Legislative session that follows.

This past fall, one of those issues which received favorable passage with the SHL was to encourage our Kansas Legislature to pass a bill allowing for Medicaid Expansion in Kansas. There are two main reasons why our organization supported this proposal with over an 86% favorable vote. First, our hospitals, especially our rural hospitals, desperately need this funding to help them meet the health care needs of their citizens, and especially of the financially struggling citizens in their area. The hospitals in our state have currently missed out on over \$1.2 billion in Medicaid reimbursement, and that amount continues to rise daily. That is a frightening statistic for our Senior population who are so dependent on our hospitals for their medical care needs. Secondly, there are nearly 60,000 Kansans in the coverage gap, with another 90,000 who would qualify for coverage if Kansas were to expand Medicaid, according to the non-partisan Kaiser Family Foundation. Of this 150,000 population group, basic math would indicate that approximately 16,000 of these citizens fall between the ages of 60-65 years old – not old enough to qualify for Medicare, yet they don't earn enough to be able to afford health care insurance. This group falls within the demographics that the Silver Haired Legislature represents. Considerably over half of these people work a minimum of 24 hours per week – they are referred to as the "working poor". Their wages simply do not support the current cost of unsubsidized medical health insurance.

It is the position of the Silver Haired Legislature that Kansas needs to expand Medicaid to help both of these groups, and all of us in the long run. Our hospitals are wanting the desperately needed income, and our uninsured citizens, including those between the ages of 60-65, pleading for the health improving, and even life-saving coverage. Please pass this bill favorably out of this committee, to the benefit of our fellow Kansas residents.