



Testimony in Support of SB 252 – Medicaid Expansion

The Rev. Susan Candea, Bishop of the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, representing the Synod and Kansas Interfaith Action

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare, Sen. Gene Suellentrop, Chair

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bollier, members of the committee –

My name is Rev. Susan Candea, and I serve as Bishop of the Central States Synod of the ELCA, which includes 108 churches in Kansas. I speak on behalf the Synod and on behalf of Kansas Interfaith Action, the interfaith advocacy organization which serves as our state public policy office. I am here to speak — strongly, and with moral clarity -- in favor of SB 252.

The issue of access to affordable health care has long been an area of great concern for the faith community, in Kansas and nationally. KIFA has submitted testimony in support of expansion on numerous occasions since 2017; we've met with legislators; we've prayed about it; we've even protested. Expansion is long overdue. ***We consider Medicaid expansion Kansas' most pressing moral priority, and SB 252 is the best way to move this policy forward.***

We take this position based on our Scriptural and moral values. In Genesis it says, "[everyone] is created in the image of God"; we take from this that access to health care should be universal. In Matthew it says, "what you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me," from which we take that care should not be limited by ability to pay. Our denomination, the ELCA, along with the other denominations that make up our coalition — Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Reform Jewish, and Muslim — have all released statements and advocated both nationally and in states in support of Expansion. We are in agreement that ***expansion is a moral necessity.***

Every day that Medicaid expansion is delayed people – working people in service or care industries, people with disabilities, real Kansans with real health needs – go without medical attention, and even die. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that 288 Kansans aged 55-64 have died since 2017 due to the lack of Expansion. Further such deaths are preventable when we have the means available to help them. ***An ethic of life demands Medicaid Expansion.***

We believe that this agreement is a strong bill that will address concerns on all sides. We are concerned about premiums but we are willing to accept them in the spirit of compromise. We strongly urge this committee not to add amendments that would endanger the compromise, especially work requirements. The issue of self-reliance is addressed in the bill by the work referral program, which we support. This is a much more effective way to deal with this issue than threatening access to healthcare. The evidence shows that those who are eligible for expansion and can work are already working. Work requirements prevent people from accessing healthcare, as in Arkansas where strict work requirements knocked 18,000 people off Medicaid – not because they weren't working, but because the

documentation was onerous. Work requirements also add to the administrative cost for the state, with no benefit to the people Medicaid serves, who should be our first concern.

Other conferees will speak about the economic reasons to expand Medicaid, which are many. My role here is to bring a moral voice. We care about Expansion because we are concerned for poor and working people, and we care for them because our Scriptures and our values tell us to do so. Expansion is as clear a moral imperative as there is in Kansas policy right now. It is long overdue. It is supported by the majority of Kansans, by the governor and by most of the legislature. It will extend access to people who — for no other reason that they are human beings, created, like all of us, in the image of God -- deserve quality and affordable healthcare. It will “bring in from the cold” tens of thousands of Kansans who have previously been excluded from a human right: access to affordable, quality medical care.

I urge this committee to send SB 252, without amendment, to the full Senate. It is, when all is said and done, the right thing to do.

Thank you for your attention.

ELCA Central States Synod (Kansas and Missouri)

420 W 14th St #101, Kansas City, MO 64105

(913) 948-9701

<https://www.css-elca.org>

Kansas Interfaith Action

PO Box 654, Lawrence, KS 66044

(913) 232-2336

kifa@kansasinterfaithaction.org