



KANSAS ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

CARING FOR KANSANS

March 18, 2015

To: House Health & Human Services Committee
From: Doug Gruenbacher, MD, President
Re: Testimony on HB 2319

Chairman Hawkins, Vice Chair Concannon, Rep. Ward & Members of the House Health & Human Services Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 2319, on behalf of the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians (KAFP). Our organization has over 1,630 members across the state, of which more than 1060 are practicing physicians, 125 are resident-physician members, and the others are medical students and retired members. KAFP represents more than 1,560 practicing, resident and medical student members from across this great state. The mission of KAFP is to promote access to, and excellence in, health care for all Kansans through education and advocacy for family physicians and their patients. Quality health care and health outcomes for our patients guide our public policy work. As family physicians, we see people of all ages, both men and women, and we work with almost every type of ailment and illness that afflict our patients.

KAFP supports the proposed expansion of KanCare and HB 2319. Here are some of the reasons:

Our mission is to provide health care for ALL Kansans, not just the insured. Our members provide care for Kansans who, at this time, fall through the cracks for health insurance. It has been proven that those individuals with insurance have better health outcomes due to more appropriate care. It is not uncommon for me and others caring for the uninsured to have patients who simply don't show up for follow up appointments or receive necessary tests because they can't afford them. These lapses in care often result in more health care costs in their future, due to complications and increased severity of the illness.

Uninsured patients are the biggest problem for our emergency rooms. Due to the laws requiring all patients receive care in emergency rooms, uninsured patients will often utilize these facilities as their main health care. Emergency rooms are the most expensive ways to deliver health care and this type of health care utilization has a trickle down effect raising health care costs for everyone, insured and uninsured!

In Gove County, my four partners and I staff the emergency room and provide care for all patients, regardless of income and insurance. We are self employed and recently reviewed our accounts receivable. We have almost \$100,000 in billing to those who would be eligible for KanCare, if expanded. That billing will likely be written off, as we know these patients have no

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possible way of paying for these bills. Many of them try to pay 10 to 50 dollars a month but, due to illness costs and the many other expenses they have, these bills are neglected when unable to pay. Insurance is undoubtedly more expensive for all others in order to make up for these uninsured patients. Kansans pay higher premiums in order to offset the costs of the uninsured. Kansans also pay federal income tax that is meant to pay for KanCare expansion. In essence, Kansans are paying TWICE to care for our uninsured!

My patients who are eligible for KanCare expansion are largely hard-working individuals. They are doing their best to make ends meet in tough economic times. I often care for families with children who are covered through KanCare, but parents who are not. I may treat the whole family but, unfortunately, the parents don't get necessary tests or treatments due to cost and lack of insurance. This often leads to more health issues for the parents that could have been prevented. Children raised by parents who are in poor health are at higher risk for chronic health problems, themselves, leading to a vicious cycle of poor health and, often, to poverty.

My local hospital, Gove County Medical Center, like many other rural hospitals, is struggling to balance its budget. Caring for the uninsured is a tremendous financial burden. These patients come to the emergency room where the most expensive care is delivered, but the hospital is unable to recoup the cost of their care. In tough financial times, budget cuts must be made; staffing and services suffer. With expansion, our rural hospital, which provides care to an 8-10 county area of hard-working Kansans, would see significant improvements in its reimbursement rates. This will give us the freedom to continue to provide excellent care for Gove County and much of northwest Kansas.

By the end of 2015, over \$355 million dollars will have left Kansas that was intended to pay for KanCare expansion. I can only imagine how that amount of money could have made a positive impact on the health of my patients and other hard-working Kansans. Please consider putting patients ahead of politics and vote YES to expand KanCare! Vote yes for HB 2319.

Sincerely,

Doug Gruenbacher M.D.

President, Kansas Academy of Family Physicians

Quinter, Kansas