



Press Release

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“Proposed Health Cuts are Bad for People, Bad for Business, and Bad for Virginia”

Coalition Members Respond to the House and Senate Budget Proposals and their Impact on Jobs, Virginia’s Economy and the Health Safety Net

Richmond, VA- Virginia should be moving forward to improve health care – especially during a recession when so many families are struggling just to get by. This is the message of the Healthcare for All Virginians (HAV) Coalition, a group of sixty-five organizations representing health care providers, consumers, insurers, and businesses. The coalition is advocating for accessible and affordable quality health care for all Virginians with a focus on covering all children, improving coverage for working adults and securing adequate payment for providers.

However, according to Jill Hanken, Staff Attorney at the Virginia Poverty Law Center, instead of moving forward, the budgets released by the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees are “turning the clock back decades, forfeiting hundreds of millions in federal dollars that support services, jobs and economic activity, and hurting children and other vulnerable populations.”

Speakers at the Thursday press conference concluded that the proposed health cuts are “bad for people, bad for business, and bad for Virginia.” The coalition objects to cuts in FAMIS coverage for uninsured children. Kathy Mingledorff who is the mother of a disabled son and a volunteer from the March of Dimes, explained that she “could never have cared for him without FAMIS.” Medicaid and FAMIS gave her the opportunity to “care for my family, garner employment and now be able to pay for my own health insurance.” She warned that proposed cuts in the House budget that would reduce FAMIS eligibility would mean that “30,000 children and hundreds of pregnant women could lose their coverage” and Virginia’s eligibility would be ranked lower than 49 states and D.C.

Concerns of the elderly and disabled were described by the AARP's representative, Irving Taylor. He said a proposed cut in the Senate budget would end coverage of 16,000 very poor elderly and disabled Virginians and was "cruel" and "devastating for poor disabled adults who must wait 24 months" for Medicare coverage. He also criticized cuts to community based care programs, stating "Research shows that the vast majority of Virginians want to receive long-term services and supports in their homes and communities. Cutting back on those services will inevitably result in higher costs" to Virginia.

Molly Cheek, a licensed clinical social worker, cautioned that "for every dollar cut from Virginia's Medicaid program, the state's economy loses \$4.25." Instead of cutting one billion dollars from Medicaid, those funds should be spent on health services and salaries to "generate sales taxes and income taxes and consumer spending all around the Commonwealth." She pointed out the proposed cuts to provider payments would lead to job losses and fewer doctors who would accept Medicaid, forcing patients into emergency rooms for care. She said "We will see much more overcrowding and longer wait times in the ER for all Virginians, including the insured."

Should Virginia "give tax money to Hollywood movie makers" or protect health care for kids and pregnant women?, asked Ali Faruk from the Interfaith Center for Public Policy. "Do we protect health care for the elderly and the disabled, or do we re-open rest stops". Despite its relative wealth, Virginia ranks poorly in terms of eligibility, services, and provider payments in its health programs, ranking 48th nationally in per capita Medicaid spending and 44th in eligibility for parents. Faruk said "in health care, we just do not live up to our potential. We cannot continue to weaken our public health programs that provide protection to those that lose or cannot access health insurance at work."

The HAV Coalition plans to urge the General Assembly to avoid the most harmful health cuts, particularly cuts to provider payments and eligibility changes in FAMIS and Medicaid that will deny coverage to tens of thousands of children and very low income elderly and disabled. People concerned about the health cuts can call their legislators through AARP's call-in system 1-800-211-0914.