



Sunflower Foundation

HEALTH CARE FOR KANSANS

Testimony to the House Health and Human Services Committee Supporting HB 2064

Feb. 8, 2017

Chairman Hawkins and honorable members of the committee,

Sunflower Foundation was established in 2000 to improve the health of Kansans. We work in all 105 counties, in communities of all sizes, and with a diversity of community leaders all committed to making their towns healthy, both medically and economically. HB 2064 will help them reach this goal.

On behalf of Kansans everywhere and rural communities across our state, **we urge the committee to pass House Bill 2064 forward with a favorable recommendation.** By approving HB 2064, Kansas will be putting itself in the best position to take full advantage of whatever the future of health reform holds. It is not too late to take this step, but it is imperative that we take this step *now*. In fact, other conservative states—like Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan—are already taking steps to ensure the Medicaid expansion that they passed will be preserved amid the uncertainty in Washington, D.C.

There are many important reasons to support Medicaid expansion. Today, we would like to focus on why Medicaid expansion is critical to the sustainability of rural Kansas, and therefore critical for Kansas.

Rural communities are part of the lifeblood of Kansas, and part of what makes our proud state such a wonderful place to live and raise a family. Supporting and sustaining rural health should be one of the top policy priorities for our state.

One-third of Kansans live in a rural county. Their quality of life depends on access to emergency and other health care. Rural hospitals are often the largest economic engine in town. Loss of the hospital means losing dozens of the town's highest paying jobs and a significant portion of their tax base. Without a hospital, hope of growing these communities diminishes.

Today, one in three of Kansas' community hospitals have said they are at risk of closure. We've seen the devastating effect hospital closure has on a community with the closing of the hospital in Independence just over a year ago: loss of access to hospital and emergency care; loss of 190 jobs; a plummeting tax base for all kinds of basic community needs; and other heartbreaking ripple effects throughout the community.

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Independence isn't just the name of a place—it has been home to an average of 10,000 families dating back to 1870. Today, about 9,000 Kansans live, work, and play there.

Independence has been the childhood home to Kansas Governor Alf Landon, baseball star Mickey Mantle, CBS News Anchor Bill Kurtis, Harry Sinclair (founder of Sinclair Oil), Pulitzer Prize-winner William Inge, widely revered missionary Tacy Atkinson, Sheila Bair (whose leadership helped in weathering the 2008 financial crisis), current Attorney General Derek Schmidt, and countless other Kansans who have positively impacted life in our state and country.

What is the potential economic impact of HB 2064? Right now, Kansas is forfeiting \$1.9 million *each day* by not expanding Medicaid—that now totals more than **\$1.69 billion** lost over the last five years. And even more astounding is that Kansans have already paid for expansion through their tax dollars. It is time to bring back these dollars to our state—now more than ever, given our financial challenges.

Kansas has a long history of leveraging federal funds for economic development—why would we turn away federal funds that promote the health and wellbeing of our state, our rural hospitals, and tens of thousands of hardworking Kansas families?

If you support rural communities, you must support this bill. If you support a strong and sustainable health system, you must support this bill. If you support returning Kansas tax dollars, you must support this bill. You will not be alone—82 percent of Kansans think that Legislators should approve expanding Kansas Medicaid this year.

Thank you for your leadership in our state and for the opportunity to express our support for HB 2064.

Sincerely,

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