



Sunflower Foundation

Written Testimony of the Sunflower Foundation to the
Senate Joint Committee on Ways and Means and Public Health and Welfare
and House Health and Human Services Committee
Proponent SB 355 and HB 2556 · March 20, 2024

Sunflower Foundation, established in 2000, works to improve the health of all Kansans. It serves all 105 counties, in communities of all sizes, alongside community members and leaders all of whom are committed to making their towns healthy and economically viable. SB 355 will help them reach this goal.

The value of Medicaid Expansion for rural hospitals and working Kansans who are not currently eligible for Medicaid is well known. Our testimony today will focus on new information highlighting the views of Kansas businesses.

To gain insights into how Kansas small businesses think about Medicaid expansion in Kansas, Sunflower Foundation worked with **Public Opinion Strategies and Neil Newhouse** to design a straightforward poll. Conducted November 10-20, 2023, the poll focused on small business owners, registered voters, and Republican primary voters and included over 1,000 respondents.

Why Public Opinion Strategies?

- Neil Newhouse is one of the Republican Party's leading pollsters and strategists.
- Newhouse brings 40 years of experience in public opinion research.
- Neil has been named "Pollster of the Year" by the American Association of Political Consultants a record-tying three times for his work on political and public affairs campaigns.

Why this poll is important.

- Sunflower Foundation commissioned the poll to understand the views of small businesses and Kansas voters and to provide new information for state lawmakers about the economic impact of Medicaid expansion.
- The poll illustrates a growing sentiment among Kansans that Medicaid expansion is both a health care and economic issue, especially when viewed locally.
- Poll findings show clear support for expansion, particularly among small business owners.

Key findings from the poll.

- To limit bias, respondents were asked their opinion on expanding Medicaid prior to hearing any of the projected benefits. This simple, yet effective, question designed by Newhouse yielded the following results:
 - **83% of small business owners favored expansion before hearing the benefits.**
 - 68% of registered voters favored expansion before hearing the benefits.
 - 51% of Republican primary voters favored expansion before hearing the benefits.
- Not surprising, when voters were provided information on the positive impacts of Medicaid expansion, support for the initiative grew:
 - 83% of small business owners favored expansion once informed.
 - 78% of registered voters favored expansion once informed.
 - 62% of Republican primary voters favored expansion once informed.



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When talking with businesses, they shared the challenges and opportunities that Medicaid expansion presents to their communities and the state overall.

Why Medicaid expansion matters to businesses.

- In Clay County we heard from business owners who are looking to expansion to **reduce economic disruptions and provide more stability** in their local economy.
- In Nemaha County we heard that strengthening the local health care infrastructure will **provide benefits to all local businesses**.
- In Sedgwick County we heard that improving the health care infrastructure will **generate more employment opportunities** and provide a needed boost to the overall economy.

Medicaid expansion, thinking beyond health care access.

- 95% of small business owners said the **opportunity to add new jobs** in Kansas was the most pivotal argument. Based on projections and the experience of other states, Kansas is expected to gain 10,000 -20,000 new jobs under expansion.
- 93% of small business owners said the ability to **prevent a family illness or health problem from turning into bankruptcy** or the loss of a home was critical.
- 89% of small business owners cited the need to **alleviate general workforce issues** and **keep Kansas economically competitive** as the primary driver for expanding Medicaid.

While small businesses see the need to expand Medicaid in terms of maintaining their own competitiveness and vitality, larger businesses also weighed in on this important topic. We heard from many in **agriculture, manufacturing and aircraft** about the need to maintain a strong supply chain which relies heavily on small businesses and the critical need to keep small communities viable so that the larger employers invested in these towns can continue to recruit and retain the workforce they need to stay in business.

In their own words.

*“Our rural communities are often struggling to keep Main Street open and to continue to offer the necessary services to the surrounding agricultural enterprises. A community that can offer a total health care package has an advantage in maintaining a viable town.” **Steve Baccus-longtime Ottawa County farmer and former president of Kansas Farm Bureau.***

*“The presence of hospitals in these communities is key to attracting workers and families. We need to expand Medicaid to ensure that we can continue to provide quality health care in our rural communities.” **John O. Farmer IV- president of oil and gas producer John O. Farmer, Inc., in Russell.***

This is both a health issue and an economic issue. Kansas is unique and special because of its patchwork of small communities that comprise the state. Small towns are one of our greatest assets. Now is the time to approve Medicaid Expansion – not only for economic stability – but for the sustainability of our small towns, the heart and soul of Kansas.

Respectfully Submitted,

Billie Hall
President and CEO
Sunflower Foundation