

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



June 1, 2015

The Honorable Steve Crisafulli
Speaker of the House
Room 420, The Capitol
402 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: Responding to House Concerns with Medicaid Expansion

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As the Special Session convenes and the legislature prepares to consider proposals to extend coverage to many of Florida's uninsured population, we appreciate that the House has prepared the document *Why the Florida House opposes Medicaid Expansion*. Putting concerns in writing provides an opportunity for dialogue that might not otherwise take place. The following reflects our desire to promote the best policies for residents of Florida.

Undergirding Principle Guiding the Conference

It has long been our concern that accessible health care is a right that flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that resides in every person. Access to care is constitutive of a fruitful life and so we encourage the legislature to establish policies to make care more accessible.

Medicaid and Florida's Most Vulnerable

The House rightly notes that Florida's Medicaid program currently serves many of our most vulnerable residents (nursing home residents, pregnant women, and children). However, we are concerned that there are others who remain among the "most vulnerable" who are not currently eligible for Medicaid. These include the many working Floridians whose incomes are too low to receive federal subsidies. It is a sad irony that they earn too little to benefit from federal subsidies, and because of current Florida policies, get no assistance whatsoever in obtaining health insurance.

Being uninsured includes risks of illness and complications, often borne of lack of preventive care and delayed treatment, as well as emotional and financial insecurity. The House implies that people should work harder or at different jobs to qualify for subsidies. In Florida's economy, simply changing jobs to a more lucrative one is not an option for the self-employed and those who work in the service sector.

We urge deeper consideration of the plight of those whose skills and opportunities simply do not permit them to earn a level of income that allows purchase of insurance. There are also broader social benefits to removing the "hidden tax" on businesses and individuals who shoulder the costs of the uninsured.

Reflections on “Crowd Out”

The House is concerned that people will lose federal subsidies and will lose private insurance, a dynamic known as “crowd out. To address this concern the Senate has proposed subsidies to assist people who would qualify for expanded coverage to keep their current insurance.

Capacity of Delivery System

It has been proposed that there are not sufficient physicians to tend to the needs of Florida’s uninsured. Extending coverage could be enhanced by following the lead of other states to increase the scopes of practice of health care personnel. This will help the “supply” of providers to meet the needs of all insured patients.

Concern for Federal Partners and Deficit Spending – Considerations & Future Remedies

We share concerns for the federal budget but hold at present, prudentially, that utilizing such funding provides significant benefits to the vulnerable members and to broader society as well. It also seems that other federal funding – notably for education and transportation – in the Florida budget has not been subject to the same scrutiny or review.

Florida’s legislature meets annually. If it is evident that coverage expansion is not working for Florida and the fiscal dynamics make coverage expansion unsustainable, the legislature can and must “right the ship” in future years, difficult as that can be politically.

Recommend Good Faith in Conditional Coverage Extension

The House can develop a coverage expansion plan that can be offered to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in such a way that if any state-specific requirements are not allowed (or enforcement is not allowed), the proposal would not be implemented. Submitting such a plan would show good faith in pursuit of a very laudable policy goal of increasing access to care for vulnerable Floridians.

Thank you for your consideration, for your leadership of the Florida House of Representatives and ultimately the people of Florida. We welcome the opportunity to respond to any questions and to engage more deeply in this dialogue with you and the legislature.

Sincerely,



Michael B. Sheedy
Executive Director

cc: Most Rev. Thomas Wenski, Archbishop of Miami and President, FCCB
Most Rev. Robert N. Lynch, Bishop of St. Petersburg and FCCB Health Moderator
Michael McQuone, Associate Director for Health