



American
Heart
Association.

To: Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
Fr: Melissa Dodge
Re: SB 252, Proponent Testimony

January 24, 2020

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Melissa Dodge. I am a single working mom to four amazing children, two of whom are special needs. They are my motivation for being a congenital heart defect and autism advocate. All four of my children are KanCare enrollees through the Children's Health Insurance Program. They are a thriving happy bunch. Their resilience is a testament to the blessing of Medicaid access. But, if I'm being honest, it is also a testament to my health and my resilience. I am the glue that keeps the unit together. My well being cannot be detached from the functioning of the whole. I am currently uninsured and one of the estimated 150,000 Kansans living in the "KanCare Gap."

Over the years, I have become quite accustomed (and quite determined) in speaking out on behalf of my children. I am motivated to do whatever it takes to obtain the access and adaptations to allow for their educational and emotional growth, health, safety and happiness. It has not been an easy road for us, it is a road that is marked by surgeries, diagnoses and doctor's visits, as well as the usual stiches and sniffles.

My daughter Brooklynn is the motivation for my American Heart Association advocacy. Brooklynn is 8 years old and her diagnosis is extensive. In addition to having hypoplastic left heart syndrome, she doesn't have 100 percent lung function due to a 2016 diagnosis of chronic lung disease. We also found out that she is missing a large part of her neurological anatomy. She's undergone 21 surgeries, three of which were open-heart procedures. She has overcome a paralyzed diaphragm and is still living with a paralyzed vocal cord. More recently, one of Brooklyn's brothers received an autism diagnosis. It is all quite a lot for me to manage, but I do...day in and day out.

Speaking of days, mine are spent making sure the kids get to school and a multitude of doctors' appointments, some of which require 6 hours round trip to Kansas City. I live with my mom and stepdad, which enables me to work a part time job at night, while they watch my kids. My employer does not offer health insurance for part-time workers, which is why I am uninsured and living in the "KanCare gap." I make too much to qualify for Medicaid coverage, but not enough to qualify for assistance through the ACA marketplace exchange.

Caregivers are more likely to lack health insurance coverage. It is a burden and health risks can hinder caregivers' ability to provide care, lead to higher healthcare costs and affect the quality of life of both the caregiver and care receivers. Expansion reduces debt and unpaid bills, is associated with a reduction in high interest "payday loans" and allows the working poor to better maintain their employment.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share my family's story, giving voice to Kansas caregivers and to the working uninsured. My kids are testament to the fact that serious illness and disability can happen to anyone and our health is never guaranteed. My lack of comprehensive physical and mental health care is a family need that is not being met. The consideration of SB 252 by this committee is a pivotal step toward meeting that need. I wish you the best as you consider this important legislation that would have such a meaningful impact on my family and so many others.

Thank you for your consideration,

Melissa Dodge
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