

The Columbus Dispatch

Opponents: Medicaid fee plan would hurt poorest

Written by: William T. Perkins, April 23, 2016

About a dozen people spoke out against a state plan that would implement new fees for those receiving government health coverage, saying the proposal would disproportionately penalize the poorest in the state and cause tens of thousands of Ohioans to lose coverage.

The proposal requires certain Medicaid recipients — including those being treated for breast and cervical cancer, teens coming out of foster care and other working-age, nondisabled adults — to pay a monthly premium of 2 percent of their income to continue receiving benefits. Fees would be capped at \$99 a year. The plan could cause nearly 15 percent of Medicaid recipients to drop out of the program, state officials say.



Ohio Statehouse

The Ohio Department of Medicaid held the first of two public hearings on the proposal Thursday.

Those affected by the proposal "can't buy tissues, they can't buy soap, they can't buy yogurt," said Francine Travis, a Columbus resident. "These are the things we take for granted every day."

The hearing included testimony from several members of policy- and health-care-related organizations, including Policy Matters Ohio and the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition. But about half of those giving testimony were private citizens, like Travis.

House Republicans added the provision to the state budget last year to fund the state's Medicaid expansion under Obamacare in 2014.

Wendy Patton, senior project director at Policy Matters Ohio, said, based on a report released earlier this month by the Department of Medicaid, the proposal was likely to decrease health-care access among low-income individuals, and would not increase the efficiency or quality of care.

"We really don't know who is helped and who is hurt by the plan," she said. "The evaluation metrics are too broad."

Nita Carter, health equity project director for the Universal Health Care Action Network, said the plan could undo progress from expanded health-care coverage.

"Those we see are grateful to have health coverage, and many are just learning how to use that coverage," she said.

Opponents also argued that the premiums would likely cause more people to head to the emergency room for simple health-care needs, or forego treatment altogether.

"How is this good for anybody? How is it caring for anybody?" said Rosetta Leaper, another Columbus resident. "I'll tell you right now, it doesn't smell right, and I'm not going to eat it."