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UHCAN Ohio Dubs “Healthy Ohio” Waiver, #NotHealthy4Ohio

Tomorrow, the Ohio Department of Medicaid will open public comment on their proposal to significantly change Ohio’s Medicaid program based on guidelines passed by the State Legislature in the last state budget. These proposed changes could cause more than 1 million of Ohio’s most vulnerable people including women, parents, people who are homeless, and others, to lose their health coverage by forcing Medicaid enrollees to pay monthly premiums that aren’t affordable and establishing confusing health spending accounts.

Currently, Medicaid helps many Ohioans, like Jackie B. get and keep employment, stabilizes their families, and helps them stay healthy.

Jackie B. is a retail worker and single mom of four children. Her present employer offers health coverage, but at around \$ 40.00 per week out of pocket, it’s simply too expensive. Until last year, when Jackie qualified for Medicaid under the expansion, Jackie had to deal with the day-to-day worry of being uninsured. Over the course of 13 years without access to regular health care, Jackie’s medical needs, went largely unaddressed and her only source of care was the hospital emergency room. Now that she has coverage through Medicaid, she gets the care she needs. But, with the changes proposed in the Medicaid waiver, Jackie fears she will not be able to meet the monthly premiums and could lose the care she went so long without. “I can’t go back to life without health coverage”, said Jackie. “I can now get the care I need to lead a full and productive life,” says Jackie.

The proposed changes could also add to the overall cost of our health system by increasing administrative costs, through a new debit card system. It creates a number of new variables that the state must administer and track. Setting up and maintaining administrative systems costs money. Experiences in several states like Arkansas and Oregon have shown that Medicaid program elements like health spending accounts can be costly to administer and premiums can cause a decline in program enrollment.

“This proposal, if approved, will undermine the progress Ohio has made in increasing access to health care, said Steve Wagner, Executive Director of UHCAN Ohio. “This proposal hurts people like servers at restaurants, retail associates, and caregivers. These are people who are barely getting by as it is. Studies show that requiring our lowest income neighbors and friends to pay for health care costs makes them put off getting important preventive care and instead only going to the doctor when the problem

is severe. This “sick-care” drives up health care costs in the long term. If the intention of this proposal is to reduce Medicaid spending while growing healthy families, it is misguided,” said Wagner.

UHCAN Ohio is encouraging people who get their health coverage through Medicaid or care about low income families to participate in the 2 open comment periods, at the state and federal level. “The state and federal government needs to hear how these changes would affect peoples' access to quality health care”, said Ms. Carter. “There are many ways to make your voice heard, like sharing your personal experience at one of the hearings or through a written submission. Organizations can develop their own comments based on the interests of those they serve, sign on to a letter, or participate in the hearings, said Carter. “Ultimately, we’re asking the federal government to reject Ohio’s waiver proposal in order to protect families so they can get the care they need to live healthier lives,” said Carter.

To learn more about how to participate in the state or federal comment periods, please visit, <http://uhcanohio.org/HealthyOhioMedicaidWaiver>.

UHCAN Ohio is a statewide, non-profit organization working to build the voice of consumers to achieve quality, affordable, accessible health care for all Ohioans.

www.uhcanohio.org

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