

Protect Your Care Press Conference 10/30/13

My name is Margaret Salinger, and I am here on behalf of The League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad. The League of Women Voters is a national, nonpartisan organization whose goal is to promote sound, socially just public policy. I am here today to urge our governor and our legislators to expand Medicaid in North Carolina because it is the economically sound and socially just thing to do. It would benefit - not only low-income citizens who cannot afford medical care – but **all** citizens of North Carolina.

Our lawmakers have committed a grave injustice. By refusing to expand Medicaid coverage, they have deprived a half million North Carolinians of the opportunity to have health insurance. Now, depriving a half million people of health insurance is certainly an injustice to those people, but let's consider the consequences to our entire state. By refusing Medicaid expansion, they forfeited *\$15 billion* in federal funds that would have created *25,000 new jobs* in the health care industry. This would have provided a significant boost to our economy. If our lawmakers had agreed to expand Medicaid, the federal government would have covered *the entire cost* for the first 3 years and 90% of the cost thereafter. This influx of federal money would have been coming from taxes that we are already paying. So, by not accepting this federal money for Medicaid, our legislators are squandering both our tax dollars and our investment in the future. North Carolinians are literally financing the health, economic stability, and well-being of citizens in *other states*. **This** is economically unsound and socially unjust for all citizens of North Carolina.

When you deny health insurance to struggling, low-income members of our state, it creates a ripple effect that impacts all of us. People who cannot afford to pay for insurance or out-of-pocket medical expenses forgo medical care and medications that are needed to manage chronic, life threatening diseases. When they absolutely must seek treatment because their health deteriorates or because they suffer acute illnesses or injury, they go to the emergency room. Being in dire straits, they might well be admitted as inpatients. There is no hope of these poor people paying their ER and inpatient bills, so the hospitals attempt to recoup their losses by raising their rates. Insurance companies then raise their premiums and copays to cover the increased costs, and the economic burden of having uninsured citizens is ultimately shifted to insurance holders.... so there is plenty of injustice to go around.

But there are other detrimental and unjust consequences of rejecting Medicaid expansion. Without Medicaid expansion, many small, rural hospitals and clinics that treat our neediest citizens will be forced to close because they will no longer receive government subsidies for treating indigent patients. With Medicaid expansion, these facilities would be guaranteed reimbursement for their services. Without Medicaid expansion, a critical mechanism for replacing federal subsidies is missing. When these hospitals and clinics die, jobs will be lost in some of the poorest counties of our state, and all patients – both insured and uninsured – will be forced to travel to distant, more affluent counties for treatment in mega-hospitals. Everyone loses in this scenario. Everyone suffers the injustice.

So, to put it in a nutshell, by refusing to expand Medicaid, our governor and state legislators are withholding from us 15 billion federal dollars, job opportunities, lower insurance costs, and accessible health care for the citizens of North Carolina. **This is economically irresponsible and socially unjust.**

The League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad calls on Gov. McCrory and our General Assembly to convene **now** to reverse course on their inhumane and poorly conceived policy. We urge our lawmakers to *bring our tax dollars back to NC* to build our economy and provide life-saving, cost-saving health care to half a million struggling men, women, and children in our state. We urge it in the name of social justice and sound economic policy. Please join the League of Women Voters in advocating for

Medicaid expansion in North Carolina by calling or writing Governor McCrory and your legislators. Our voices can change their minds!

Margaret Salinger

Co-president

League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad