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Testimony in Support of KanCare Expansion
by Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director

Special Committee on Medicaid Expansion, Rep. Brenda Landwehr, chair

Mme. Chair, members of the committee –

I write on behalf of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social and economic justice issues. We urge this committee and the legislature to take the long-overdue step of expanding Kansas’ Medicaid in accordance with the guidelines of the Affordable Care Act, to expand it to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, and to do so without any unnecessary restrictive provisions or any further delays.

The issue of access to affordable health care has been a strong concern for the faith community, in Kansas and nationally, for many years. KIFA has submitted testimony in support of expansion on numerous occasions since 2017; we’ve met with legislators; we’ve prayed about it; we’ve even protested. Expansion is long overdue. ***Kansas Interfaith Action considers KanCare expansion Kansas’ most pressing moral priority.***

We take this position based on our commitment to Scriptural and moral values. In Genesis it says, “[everyone] is created in the image of God”; we take from this that access to health care should be universal. In Matthew it says, “what you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me,” from which we take that care should not be limited by ability to pay. In addition, the denominations that make up our coalition - ELCA Lutheran, Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Reform Jewish, and Muslim – have all released statements or otherwise advocated both nationally and in individual states in support of Expansion. They are in agreement with us that ***justice requires expansion.***

Medicaid is the only option for many low-income and working Kansans. To be sure, we are mostly talking about Kansans who are working, but who make too much to be covered by traditional Medicaid. These would include workers in minimum-wage and service-industry jobs, precisely the kind of jobs that the legislature has insisted that people on public assistance take. In effect, the state has compelled people to take jobs that take away their access to health care, and this is clearly immoral. We urge this body to correct that injustice.

Every day that Medicaid remains unexpanded, people – working people, people with disabilities, real Kansans with real health needs – go without medical attention, and even die. How many Kansans have not had access to affordable health care - how many have died – because of the refusal of this legislature to take the necessary and available steps to protect them?

We understand Sen. Denning’s plan attempts to limit expansion, by expanding to only 100% of FPL and by including work references or other restrictions. We strongly urge you not to pursue that route. Each exemption pursued means months of additional delay and hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars just in legal fees, not even including what it would cost the state to implement such restrictions.

Others conferees will talk about whether the courts will allow such restrictions (probably not), and whether the federal government would give the 90% match to a smaller expansion (definitely not). KIFA role is to bring a moral voice. ***Our goal is, and yours should be, to give the largest number of people access to healthcare,*** and not to waste time figuring out ways to delay or restrict it. We urge the legislature to pass a straight expansion, to 138% of FPL, with no further delays and no additional barriers to coverage.

In conclusion: Expansion is as clear a moral imperative as there is in Kansas policy right now. It is long overdue. It is supported by the majority of Kansans, by the governor and by most of the legislature. It will include people who – for no other reason that they are human beings, created, like all of us, in the image of God - deserve quality and affordable healthcare. It will “bring in from the cold” tens of thousands of Kansans who have previously been excluded from a human right: access to affordable, quality medical care.

We urge this committee in the strongest possible terms to send a simple, clean expansion bill to legislature. It is, when all is said and done, simply the right thing to do.

Thank you for your attention.