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Medicaid Expansion  
 Carla [carlacunningham2012@gmail.com]  
 Sent: Monday, March 18, 2019 9:14 AM  
 To: Steve Johnson

OP-ED

Parents Advocate for Medicaid Expansion

By: Representative Carla D, Cunningham RN, BSN

I had the opportunity to have a difficult Listening Session this week in my General Assembly Office. I met with three parents of children that overdosed on drugs in North Carolina. I had no idea this was going to be the conversation. After we sat down, a mother spoke of her only son whom she loved dearly, in fact, her only child. She told her story of his long struggle to get treatment and stay clean, but eventually, he lost his battle to Opioid addiction.

Next, a father spoke of how his son struggled for years to get treatment and stay clean, he too spoke of how hard it was to get help because his son had no insurance, and treatment was costly and hard to find where they lived in a small town.

The last Father spoke of how he found out that his son had been using heroin for some time. He shared how his son had been in and out of treatment for years. That his son struggled but could not stay clean due to the strong hold heroin had on him.

The father stated when his son died he did not even put the obituary in the newspaper because he did not want people showing up to his son's service that did not know him, but he shared the services on social media and invited all of his son's friends to attend the services. Many young people came to his Son's servic. It was that day "This Father" began his Advocacy for those that struggle with addiction". He said he believes the only way we can save the next generation is through Medicaid Expansion.

Yes, they were advocating for Medicaid Expansion because they had experienced the loss of the Children they Love. Their children they cannot bring back to life, but these parents are willing to speak up to save their grandchildren and the next generation.

As I sat in that room with those three parents and listened to each of them tell their personal story, it brought back the memories of my own loss. I too know that helplessness of losing a loved one that had died from a drug overdose.

I recognize they are not alone on this journey; in 2017, there were 1,884 confirmed unintentional Opioid related Poisoning Deaths in North Carolina and 2,603 Hospitalizations for unintentional opioid poisoning. In addition to 4,991 year to date Opioid Overdose Emergency Department visits in North Carolina. The highest age group Emergency Department visits for Opioid Overdose is 25 to 34 years of age. Most of these individuals lack health care coverage.

Approximately 150,000 adults with a behavioral health or substance abuse disorder are uninsured in North Carolina. As well as, approximately 30,000 uninsured Veterans and an additional 23,000 uninsured spouses and children that lack access to healthcare.

In Mecklenburg County, if we expand Medicaid, over 32,316 people would gain coverage. Further, approximately 4,465 jobs would be created in Mecklenburg County with \$18.8 million dollars in county tax revenues and \$2.9 billion in county business activities.

Mecklenburg County by the numbers in 2018, there were 540 Opioid Overdose Emergency Department visits. Opioid poisoning deaths in the county continue to rise each year with 179 deaths recorded in 2017. Mecklenburg County has one of the highest concentrations of Opioid Overdose Emergency Department visits in the state.

This is how the formula works. Federal government pays 90% of costs and healthcare providers fund the remaining 10%. The proposed Medicaid Expansion would not cost North Carolina taxpayers and would save lives. In 2019, it is time to Expand Medicaid for the 500,000 people lacking healthcare coverage. Call your North Carolina State Representatives and Senators and tell them that you support Medicaid Expansion for North Carolina families.



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