



9 S. Jefferson Ave.

Iola, Kansas 66749

January 17, 2020

Senator Gene Suellentrop, Chairman  
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee  
Kansas State Capitol  
300 SW 10th St.  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Suellentrop and Members of the Public Health and Welfare Committee,

Thrive Allen County is a nonprofit organization located in Iola that focuses on improving health, wellness, recreation and education conditions in our county. Our vision is that Allen County will become the healthiest rural county in Kansas, and we do this through supporting and encouraging programs, policies and resources that promote access to healthcare, healthy lifestyles and positive community conversation.

This testimony is submitted in support of expanding Medicaid in the state of Kansas. As an organization that works intensively “on the ground” in rural Southeast Kansas we have seen firsthand the extraordinary need for Medicaid expansion--as well as the opportunity it holds to bolster our county’s healthcare system.

Thrive participates in the Allen County Rural Health Initiative, which consists of all the safety-net healthcare providers in Allen County, including Allen County Regional Hospital. Uncompensated care is a major concern of our county’s hospital. Medicaid expansion would provide significant new revenues, ensuring the continued financial stability of our hospital. For those concerned about property taxes this means a lower likelihood that the hospital will require infusions of cash from the county’s general fund. Keeping the hospital from becoming a property tax burden for our small businesses and families is an economic imperative of our community.

Beyond the hospital, Thrive’s staff has included certified Assistors over every enrollment period who work with community members from Allen and surrounding counties to navigate the Federal Health Insurance Marketplace. Our staff has worked with 2,160 individuals over the past seven years to get them health insurance through the Marketplace. 1,197 of these individuals qualified for insurance plans, but 307 fell below 100% of the federal poverty level, where they are unable to get tax credit assistance to pay for insurance and unable to qualify for Medicaid under Kansas’ current system. That means 14% of the people we met with at Thrive fell into the “Medicaid Gap.” Many more, who are not included in this 14%, made phone calls to Thrive during the open enrollment periods, where our Assistors pre-screened them and let them know they would not qualify for health insurance because they made too little money.

Most of these individuals falling into the Medicaid Gap work at least one job; many more hold two or three jobs. We live in a rural community where wages are lower than metropolitan areas.

Our working-class families are doing everything they can to keep their families afloat. They come into Thrive excited that they will finally have health insurance, many for the first time in their adult lives, only to be told that under the current system in Kansas they are too poor to be able to receive care. The most unfortunate part of this is how many of these people already expect this answer; they have been denied services their whole adult lives and feel it is just their lot in life to be discarded and looked over.

If Medicaid were expanded in the state of Kansas, these individuals would be able to receive preventive care, instead of using the hospital emergency room as their primary care center, which in turn reduces indigent costs at Allen County Regional Hospital. They would be able to receive the prescriptions they need to better function and contribute even more fully to the workforce and our communities.

Thrive believes that expanding Medicaid will better our community's physical and mental health, increase workforce productivity, and create more security for families. We strongly encourage and support the expansion of Medicaid in Kansas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisse Regehr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "R".

Lisse Regehr  
President and CEO