

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.721, the “Medicaid Expansion Act of 2024”, and for your work on this bill, which I believe sets out the right policy direction for tackling the healthcare crisis.

My name is Kate Kanelstein, and I’m the director of the Vermont Workers’ Center, a statewide organization founded in 1998. For the past fifteen years we’ve coordinated the Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign to make healthcare a public good, and we were very active in the effort to pass and implement Act 48.

We’re currently part of a national organizing drive of people on or unfairly excluded from Medicaid with the aim of raising the profile of the 16 million who’ve lost their healthcare so far in the post-pandemic Medicaid cutoffs, including almost 30,000 people in Vermont.

I want to underscore something that comes through in people’s testimony, which is the sense of urgency and moral purpose. I’m aware that much of this bill has been committed to a technical analysis, and we don’t currently know the turnaround time for that analysis. We do know, though, that about 1500 Vermonters are getting kicked off of Medicaid every month, or are delaying care or losing loved ones due to cost and lack of access. We would really encourage the committee to advance the bill as originally introduced.

If it’s OK with the chair, I’d like to make a few very quick comments on the bill.

Under Section 3, the implementation timeline: Once the state is administratively prepared to expand coverage beyond 133 percent FPL, why not expand directly to 312 percent FPL in 2026, instead of an incremental phase-in? This would allow for thousands of people who are struggling now to get relief, without waiting years to do so.

Section 5, reimbursement rates - We support Planned Parenthood in requesting that reproductive and gender-affirming care be included in any analysis or mandatory rate increase.

Section 8, IHIP - As Abel mentioned, this is critical ^{and} — we have to see age 26 is a step towards all Vermont residents being included in Medicaid, with no exclusions.

Section 12, the cost-sharing study: We’re concerned that cost-sharing, especially if it’s used to generate revenue to pay for expanded coverage, would create a two-tier Medicaid system and replicate the barriers to care associated with private health insurance plans.

Finally, we’d like to propose adding language to Section 13 or 14 to conduct an updated analysis of public financing for Green Mountain Care as laid out in Act 48. One of the great tragedies of the 2014 financing plan was the way that the media coverage buried the important finding that 93 percent of Vermont families would have seen a net increase

in their income under Green Mountain Care and had comprehensive healthcare coverage. With a decade of growing inequality since then, we should know what the economics of what we would call “Medicaid for All” looks like today.

The Vermont Workers’ Center supports this bill and the important step it represents. We hope that the 80 co-sponsors, along with the 14 sponsors of S.240, the corresponding bill in the Senate, will be successful in convincing your colleagues of the need for it to be passed—as introduced—this session and its provisions fully funded. We appreciate the invitation to testify here before the committee.

At the same time, we know that there is and will be opposition to the provisions in this bill. There are powerful players in the healthcare industry who will attempt to dilute or derail it by casting doubt intended to maintain their monopoly power in the healthcare sector. And we know there will be those who oppose it under the false narrative that “we can’t afford it.” The truth is, we can’t afford to *not* do this. The human and moral cost of delay is enormous.

We hope that our testimonies today demonstrate to committee members the importance of hearing directly from the tens of thousands of people for whom this bill would be a literal lifeline, and from the front-line healthcare workers who carry the burden of the current system. We ask that you hold a public hearing in order to hear from others who would benefit from the provisions in this bill, and hope to be partners in building public support for this critical legislation.

Thank you.