



September 24, 2015

Dear CMS,

We are writing to urge support for the 1115 waivers needed for final implementation of the Montana HELP Act. A swift approval from CMS will allow the state to begin enrolling people in the plan as soon as possible, with the goal of beginning coverage by January 1, 2016.

As Montana's only statewide food bank, the Montana Food Bank Network serves more than one in eight Montanans through our network of food pantries and other emergency food providers. In a recent survey of food pantry clients, we found that 40% of households included at least one person who was uninsured. These households are more likely to have to choose between paying for medical care and paying for food, to delay seeking medical care due to cost, and to have ongoing, unpaid medical bills.

For these clients and every other Montanan currently in the coverage gap, the availability of basic health care would provide a significant step in the right direction. It would be one fewer obstacle in the uphill battle to survive from month to month. The HELP Act will allow thousands of Montanans to better access preventative care, afford needed medications, and receive essential screenings and treatments, ultimately improving health outcomes for many of our most vulnerable residents.

This plan also offers a lifeline to many of our community medical centers and rural hospitals that are struggling to keep their doors open. These hospitals and clinics are vital to communities across our large, rural state, ensuring access to quality health care for all patients. The HELP Act will reduce levels of uncompensated care, allowing these health care providers to continue operation, providing lifesaving treatments and quality jobs across Montana.

The HELP Act is a strong, compromise plan that our state worked hard to develop. Our state legislature, political leaders, and policy advocates heard hours of testimony demonstrating the urgency of passing Medicaid expansion, and worked tirelessly throughout the session to develop a bipartisan, Montana-made solution. While we do have some concerns over the copays and premiums required of all participants, we recognize that this plan is a workable solution that will effectively increase access to affordable health care in our state. We are also confident in MT-DPHHS's ability to implement the plan through a Third Party Administrator, as this model has proven successful in our Healthy Montana Kids Medicaid program.

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End Hunger in Montana.

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It is clear that the Montana HELP will create jobs, benefit our state economy, and improve the health and productivity of all Montanans, including those struggling with hunger. The Montana Food Bank Network urges CMS to approve the necessary waivers as quickly as possible.

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Montana Food Bank Network

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