



Real Possibilities

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September 8, 2015

Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell,

I am writing to urge you to approve Montana's Medicaid expansion waiver as soon as possible. For three years, AARP Montana worked hard to convince policymakers of the value of expanding Medicaid to nearly 70,000 Montanans. The result is the Montana HELP Act. Now, many Montanans in real need of health care services are waiting to enroll.

The passage of the Montana HELP Act was an enormous victory involving thousands of Montanans calling and writing to legislators, hundreds turning out for hearings and rallies, and the focused work of a very broad coalition of organizations. Governor Bullock masterfully led the negotiations with Republican and Democratic legislators to craft the final bill and gain the votes necessary for passage. The signing of the HELP Act was celebrated by hundreds of people in the Capitol, and included a special blessing offered by American Indian tribal members. Truly everyone involved felt in some way the profound importance of passing this legislation. To some it represented a moral victory of access to health care for lower income Montanans. Others appreciated this victory as a laudable bipartisan achievement. Some people simply cried because finally they or a loved one would get the health care services needed to improve or literally save a life.

Throughout the debate on the Montana HELP Act, hundreds of proponents unequivocally stayed united behind the effort to pass the bill. They understood that this legislation involved compromise, but the final result of health coverage for 70,000 Montanans was far more important than any specific provision of the bill. Like others, AARP MT was not pleased with some of the cost sharing requirements, but we clearly understood what was at stake, the quality of health of so many Montanans. For not one moment did any of us regret or voice concern about giving our full support for the Montana HELP Act. Republican legislators knew the boundaries of what CMS had approved in the past, and although they did not go as far as those boundaries in some ways, they too stayed united behind the same

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goal of expanding Medicaid. In the end, the final bill was a very delicate deal that will not happen again. This is Montana's best and only shot at Medicaid expansion.

In recent months I have spoken with Medicaid expansion advocates in states that are still struggling to get the job done. The Montana victory gives them hope, but the longer it takes CMS to approve our waiver, that hope fades and opponents will use CMS' hesitation to their advantage. Approving Montana's waiver will be a green flag to other states to keep working on the issue.

Medicaid expansion was the top issue of the 2015 session. It was an enormous effort, exhausting at times, but now many Montanans are anxiously waiting for the day to enroll. Please do what you can to expedite the waiver approval process so enrollment can begin. Feel free to contact me at cclifford@aarp.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Claudia A. Clifford
Advocacy Director AARP Montana

As a nonprofit, nonpartisan social welfare organization with a membership and offices in all 50 states, AARP's mission is to help people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We seek to help older Americans live long and healthy lives. AARP Montana, representing over 150,000 members, is Montana's largest organization representing the needs, views, desires, and hopes of Montana's 50+ population.