



## Montana Women Vote

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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,

Thank you for your time and effort these last few months with regard to Montana's Medicaid expansion waiver. I am writing in support of the Health and Economic Livelihood Partnership (HELP) Act and the resultant 1115 waiver application. I urge you to approve Montana's waiver without delay.

Montana Women Vote is a statewide organization of low-income women and families. We work to engage low-income women as informed voters, policy advocates, and community leaders, and to pass policies that will better the lives of women and families living in poverty. Access to health care has long been a crucial consideration in our work, as both research and experience show that lack of access to quality, affordable health care can negatively impact earnings and economic status, family health and wellbeing, mental health and substance abuse, and more.

Over the last three years, Montana Women Vote has worked alongside coalition partners, advocacy organizations, healthcare stakeholders, community leaders, and everyday Montanans to find a path to Medicaid expansion. With our partners, we contacted and identified over 30,000 Montanans from every corner of the state who took action in favor of expansion. We filled the hallways of the capitol and the voicemails of legislators with the voices of citizens who understood how important this policy is to the health of our neighbors and community members, to our rural hospitals and clinics, and to our state's economy.

Based on our efforts over the last three years, we understand perhaps better than most that the HELP Act is a compromise. We would prefer to see access to health care for low-income Montanans that does not come with cost sharing attached. However, we found ourselves with a choice: accept compromise or accept nothing at all. It was an easy choice to make, as this legislation provides an avenue to quality, affordable health care that we would otherwise not have. The compromise that took place earlier this year was the result of years of effort by

hundreds of people. It was not a compromise that was taken lightly or without a great deal of thought, and it is not a compromise that will withstand much change or delay. If this waiver is not approved, and approved quickly, Montana will not be able to pass Medicaid expansion legislation again.

Since April, we have talked to hundreds of Montanans in the coverage gap, and not only do they support the HELP Act, they are anxiously awaiting their opportunity to enroll in coverage. These people include Hannah, a 28-year-old member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes who suffers from Lyme Disease and can't get the treatment she needs; Lisa, a self-employed artist and substitute teacher in her 50s who – despite working two and sometimes three part-time jobs – can't afford private insurance and doesn't make enough to qualify for subsidies on the exchange; Nancy, who lost her job during treatment for breast cancer and now can't afford the follow-up care she needs to ensure she stays cancer-free. These are but a few of the many, many stories we heard of Montanans who urgently need the HELP Act to be implemented. We have also talked to advocates in states like Nebraska, Missouri, Georgia and others who are watching closely what happens with our waiver negotiations. They understand that difficult and prolonged negotiations with CMS impact not just Montana's hope for Medicaid expansion, but their opportunities to expand as well.

Approval of Montana's waiver and implementation of the HELP Act remain a top priority for organizations and individuals across the state, including thousands of Montanans who are waiting for urgently needed health coverage. I urge you to approve Montana's waiver without delay. Thank you for your support of health care access for low-income Montanans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Howell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sarah" and the last name "Howell" clearly distinguishable.

Sarah Howell  
Executive Director,  
Montana Women Vote