



montana  
HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

September 7th, 2015

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

Dear Secretary Burwell,

We are writing you today to urge the swift approval of Montana's 1115 waiver to expand our state's Medicaid program and close the coverage gap for the thousands of Montanans who are currently waiting for access to healthcare. For over three years the Montana Human Rights Network has worked with a committed coalition of organizations and engaged thousands of Montanans to take action in order to pass a policy compromise on Medicaid expansion. The Montana HELP Act, which passed in April of 2015, will extend life-saving health insurance to Montanans who desperately need it. Over the course of our campaign we have listened to Montanans who have been locked out of healthcare reform, whose health is declining, whose ability to work is held hostage by treatable illness, and who are waiting for those with power to make this change.

Getting this legislation to Governor Bullock's desk was challenging. Montana is the first state in over 20 months to approve a Medicaid expansion compromise legislatively. As you are aware, the Montana waiver is the only new waiver being negotiated currently and lawmakers in states like Wyoming, Tennessee, and Utah are watching these negotiations closely. It is clear that the process and outcome of this negotiation between Montana and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will have an impact that goes well beyond the 70,000 Montanans who continue to wait.

The Network supported the HELP Act and helped to shape it, while we have an official position in support of a single-payer healthcare system and we believe that our policies can and will improve, we know that the waiver that is being submitted to CMS is the best policy that we could achieve. We are particularly proud of the discreet ways that we were able to protect Montana enrollees in a more robust way than Indiana. For example in Indiana, enrollees under 100% of the poverty level are punished for nonpayment with a less generous benefits package and cost sharing requirements that could exceed the monthly premiums required under the more generous benefits package. In Montana we were able to achieve better policy: enrollees under 100% of the federal poverty line are not punished for nonpayment. Advocates in Montana think this is a significant improvement upon Indiana's waiver and we are proud that we were able to pass it.

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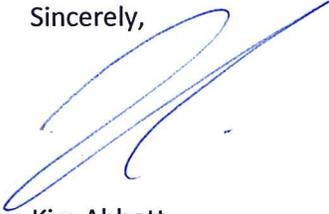
The Network recognizes the political context of Medicaid expansion in states – both the context within which policies are created and debated, and the context of negotiations once legislation has passed. State-level decisions on whether and how to expand Medicaid programs are deeply ideological and political. In Montana, the conversations that shaped a policy that could get the votes to pass and exist within the scope of previously approved waivers by CMS, were highly informed and intense. All parties involved were well aware of what CMS had approved, and Republican participants knew exactly where compromise had been granted in other states by CMS. Past waiver negotiations between CMS and other states, particularly Indiana, set the contours of what was possible to achieve in Montana. The HELP Act reflects that reality. It is in line with the waiver approved in Indiana and in line with federal Medicaid law.

Expanding Medicaid in Montana was an incredible legislative victory, but now we are anxious to move forward and implement the HELP Act. In order to do that, we need for CMS to approve Montana's waiver as quickly as possible. We hope you will do whatever you can to secure approval so we can start to enroll Montanans.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 406-442-5506 ext. 15 or [kim@mhrn.org](mailto:kim@mhrn.org).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kim Abbott', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Kim Abbott  
Co-Director