

Dear Governor Bevin,

Allow me, for a few minutes, to engage you on the battlefield of ideas - a place where political polarization is presently polluted by name-calling and ideological purity. I bring my voice to the current issue of your proposed Medicaid Waiver in the sincere hope we can find a sustainable solution to one of the most life or death issues we face. I hope the waiver you submit can be conservative (but not for its own sake), compassionate, and with an eye towards restoration of our communities. Please accept my personal story and subsequent recommendations not as an outright approval or rejection of your current plan, but as an attempt to elevate the debate beyond the demonization being leveled by liberals and conservatives against each other and towards you. I come to you as a current recipient of the Medicaid expansion and as someone whose life has been saved by medical professionals in Lexington, both before and after the Affordable Care Act was implemented.

First, I think I can summarize how some of my friends on the left read your plan. They read it as you wanting to punish poor people just for being poor. A few will dig deeply into the policy and present why they believe this and others won't bother to read your plan, but simply engage in the name-calling. And there are people on the right who will claim that the ACA and Medicaid expansion is an overreach by the Government and a wasteful use of taxpayer dollars. And some view anyone receiving any government benefits as being a lazy, taker. I must re-iterate that I am not speaking for either of these poles, but simply as someone currently being given a leg-up (not a handout) by our Federal and State governments. With perseverance and some luck I hope to achieve financial success and will happily pay more than my fair share to give others the same leg-up.

Let me briefly tell you a little about my Medical history. After I graduated college at the University of Kentucky in 2000 I did not have health insurance. I went to work for the city of Lexington's television station (GTV-3) as a camera operator. I started part-time but was eventually allowed to work up to 40 hours, but was not considered full-time or given health insurance. I was fairly healthy and was able to avoid accruing too much medical debt. After several years, around the age of 30, I was making over \$20k and I figured I should be responsible and buy my own health insurance. I did that for a few years - the premiums going up more and more and my use of the insurance staying the same (one visit per year to get thyroid meds refilled). Then the economic crash of 2008 happened and my job was eliminated.

Because of the many years and hours I had put in, I was able to receive unemployment benefits. This was a very tough time in my life emotionally. Since I was 16 years old I had always had some type of job (minus a few years during college). But I still had my health and for that I was grateful. But when my premiums had gone up to \$80/month for basically useless insurance, I decided to cancel. I kept working to become a better video editor and landed a part-time job with the Lexington Public Library's Cable Channel 20. Things were going well and I hoped the job would become full-time and therefore earn good health insurance.

After nearly a year working at the Library I literally turned yellow. My skin. My eyes. Everything. I spent 10 days at St. Joseph Hospital before they determined I had autoimmune hepatitis. A biopsy of my liver showed I had stage-3 cirrhosis. The cause remains a mystery. If not for the generosity of St. Joseph's forgiving most of my costs, I would have accrued over \$20,000 in medical debt instead of the few thousand I did. It was a fortunate turn for which I will remain grateful the rest of my life, and I vow to donate what they gave me ten fold if I have any success as a screenwriter (a goal for which I have worked hard at for over 15 years now).

By the time the ACA went into effect I had started securing extra money by doing freelance video projects. Because of the extra money, I qualified for a subsidy on the Kynect exchange but didn't qualify for the Medicaid expansion. Another year goes by and I wasn't as fortunate in getting freelance jobs and when it comes time to sign up for Health insurance I discovered I qualified for the Medicaid expansion. Because of my health problems, I was now saving around \$5,000 a year by being able to see specialists, get endoscopies, biopsies, ultrasounds, and medications, as well as not having to pay premiums.

Some conservative people in my life, and perhaps you, would say I am gaming the system. They will say you should just get another part-time job - even if it has nothing to do with your one trained skill. But look at the math. Why would I do that? Why would I work a second job for minimum wage to pay for a weak, Bronze plan private health insurance where the cost of the premiums and a high deductible would leave me in worse shape financially? I am not proud (for I find pride to be the worst sin of all) nor am I ashamed of my situation. For every organization I have worked, I have put forth a good faith effort and stated my desire to work full-time. A full-time job (doing something for which I am trained) is the only sensible option for someone who needs as much care as I do.

Since getting Passport I have been diagnosed and treated for diabetes, high cholesterol, sleep apnea in addition to being treated for my previous diagnoses of hypothyroid and autoimmune hepatitis. Perhaps there are folks who have received this level of care since the Medicaid expansion who are ungrateful or don't understand the tremendous gift and opportunity to turn their lives around in terms of health, but I doubt there are many. And this is why I am open to and willing to go take courses or volunteer to earn this level of care. For my health, I can not afford to work another part-time job, but if I can do some sort of volunteer work and earn enough money to pay for even a couple of trips to the dentist, I am willing.

My appeal is not to ask you to make any specific changes to your waiver or to not submit a waiver at all, but rather to reach out and hear more stories of the people this expansion has helped. I trust that the faith you profess is sincere, and so I ask you to seek the wisdom of the compassionate people working hard to maintain the expansion for people like me. I am not a policy expert, but folks like the Kentucky Voices for Health and the Kentucky Equal Justice Center are. You may have made enemies of many of these people, but I hope you can transcend this moment and take the following quote from Abraham Lincoln to heart. "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed."