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January 7, 2015

Honored Utah Legislator,

The Utah Nurses Association supports access to healthcare for all citizens of Utah.

This will require either the full expansion of Medicaid, or the implementation of the Governor's Healthy Utah Plan. The limited proposals currently recommended by the Health Reform Task Force will meet the needs only of the uninsured who are ALREADY seriously ill and incapacitated. ***As professional nurses, we support and encourage prevention and adequate screenings for all of our patients, both those fortunate enough to afford health insurance and those who cannot afford health insurance.***

Nurses work very hard to return our patients to the best health possible. Daily we see patients who have multisystem failure due to a lack of prevention, of timely screenings, or of healthcare education. Many of these patients require sophisticated surgery and acute care for advanced cancers. If the patients do not have health insurance, they often cannot afford the necessary follow-up chemo and radiation that are needed to truly eradicate their cancer. Charity care rarely pays for such follow-up care so that many of our patients will ultimately die of their cancer...either quietly in poverty at home, or quietly but expensively in the hospital. This is not right.

Refusing follow-up care for the uninsured is like fixing a multi-course feast and only allowing the attendees to eat the first two courses before shoving them out of the door. But at least the first two courses kept them from starving for a while. Nurses are tired and frustrated at saving lives only to have those lives end prematurely due to insufficient follow-up.

As nurses we recognize firsthand that public health suffers when part of the population cannot access timely healthcare. Do we want someone to prepare our fast food lunch who has a treatable but contagious condition? Do we want a person with Ebola to NOT go to a clinic or provider when their first serious signs appear? Do we want a parent who earns minimum wage to get that current "bug" from their child at school and then pass the bug onto an entire warehouse of employees? These are all real possibilities when a globally traveling society refuses to protect the working poor at home.

Medicaid in this state actually has served as a safety net; most Medicaid recipients stay on Medicaid for less than a year before getting employment-based insurance. Why are we refusing this safety net to the poorest of our citizens? Many of them are working multiple jobs without insurance or access to care.

You, the legislators of this state, CAN change this bleak reality for the citizens of Utah who make less than \$19,790 per year (for a family of three) or less than \$11,670 per year (for a single adult). We have studied this issue for over two years, our Governor has negotiated with the federal government and received concessions no other states have received. Nurses see the need for change, and we ask you to act now to make a change for the better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kathleen Kaufman'.

Kathleen Kaufman MS, RN
Immediate Past President
Utah Nurses Association

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