



Federal Health Care Funding Makes Dollars and Sense for Maine

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Good morning.

Thank you all for coming.

Today, Maine Equal Justice Partners and the Maine Center for Economic Policy are releasing a new report, “Federal Health Care Funding Makes Dollars and Sense for Maine.”

Maine has an incredible opportunity to fundamentally alter the lives of thousands of our family, friends and neighbors who do not have access to quality, affordable health care.

Despite working hard every day, too many Maine people are just one illness or one accident away from financial ruin because they lack health care coverage.

It doesn't have to be this way.

The Affordable Care Act has made federal funds available to expand access to health insurance to 69,500 people in our state who either don't have health insurance or who could soon lose it.

States around the country, including those with conservative governors, such as Ohio, New Jersey, Florida and Arizona, have recognized the opportunity they have to help working families become more secure. We were pleased to learn yesterday that Gov. LePage will initiate discussions with the federal government to explore this opportunity for Maine.

The reasons for doing so are compelling:

- Approximately 128,000 Mainers lack health insurance. If Maine accepts the federal funds set aside under the Affordable Care Act, then 69,500 Mainers will be eligible for coverage after Jan. 1, 2014.
- The federal government is ready to pay 100 percent of the costs for three years to provide coverage for all newly eligible individuals. After that, the federal government will pay 90 percent of the cost for these individuals.
- The majority of the people who would be eligible for coverage are working, but they don't earn enough money to be able to afford health insurance.
- Maine can protect thousands of its residents from financial ruin following one illness or accident.

Accepting federal funds to make sure that everyone can have a family doctor and get the appropriate care when they need it is the right thing to do.

As today's report shows, the impact of accepting the federal funds benefits more than just those who would get health care coverage.

It's good for Maine's economy and businesses.

It will help to reduce the growth of health insurance premiums for people who have coverage now. National estimates indicate that for the average American family, it could reduce premiums by \$1,000 a year because it would reduce the cost shift that occurs when uninsured people seek medical attention in the Emergency Room.

The economic impact of saying "yes" to these federal dollars would ripple through Maine's economy, helping to create jobs, provide economic and health care security to working families and improve health over time.

As the New England Journal of Medicine and a study in Oregon have found, people with health insurance are healthier and live longer than people without it.

It makes sense. People with health insurance can see a doctor when they get sick and not rely on the emergency room, which is the costliest place to receive care.

They can better manage chronic disease.

And they can get the right care at the right time.

We can't miss this chance to do the right thing for thousands of people, including our family, friends, and neighbors.

Before introducing our next speaker, I want to thank the American Cancer Society- Cancer Action Network for being with us today and including us in their Lobby Day activities. Accepting federal funds to cover Maine people is one of the organization's top priorities this year and we are grateful for their work and support.

I know from my own personal experience that fighting cancer is hard enough to do without the stress that comes with worrying about whether or not you can afford the treatment you need or if you're medical bills will bankrupt your family. The opportunity to cover Maine people could make a difficult time a little easier and provide greater security for thousands of Maine people.