

I would not be in medical school if not for Medicaid. I could not afford treatment without it and had no access to private insurance or student insurance. I was a young person without parental financial support, and there aren't exactly high school classes on how to navigate the healthcare system. After two years, I finally figured Medicaid out and got covered, but not until after I accumulated medical debt to haunt me. I won't go into the details of my private medical history but let's just say I would not have made it to medical school without it.

In my short time working with those experiencing homelessness, I have seen injuries and illnesses that would make you sick. I have seen frostbite blisters covering fingers and toes—due to shortage of 24/7 warming centers. I have seen burns from tents going up in flames due to open-flame propane fires being the main source of warmth in winter months in those encampments. I have seen lower legs and feet swelling so severe that their feet no longer fit in their shoes—most likely due to untreated heart failure. These aren't isolated cases. Everyone working with this population has dozens of stories just like these and worse.

Now I ask, how do I find and maintain work that offers private health insurance when my tent and everything I own has gone up in smoke? When the frostbite blisters take weeks to heal? When my shoes won't fit and I can't walk for the pain? I say again, health and housing *must* come first.

We all deserve to live in dignity and to have a community that has our back when we're at our lowest. I am not an elected official, but I am advocating on behalf of those who cannot do so themselves because that is my duty to those I serve. As elected officials, I hope you feel the same and hear my plea. As a healthcare worker, I tell you: people *will* die without Medicaid benefits. As a human, I tell you: people that *I know* will die. Without access to primary care, they will wait until their symptoms worsen to the point of an ER visit and they will die—or live with the exponentially steep consequences of severe, lifelong illness and disability.

Thank you.