



## **Opponent Testimony Senate Bill 17**

Regards eligibility for SNAP, Medicaid, and unemployment

Steven Wagner, Executive Director

Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio

[swagner@uhcanohio.org](mailto:swagner@uhcanohio.org)

24 Feb 2021

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony from the Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio (UHCAN Ohio). UHCAN Ohio is a statewide nonprofit organization uniting consumers and their allies to assure everyone has access to quality, affordable health care. We are a member of Advocates for Ohio's Future, the umbrella health and human services coalition for the state of Ohio dedicated to fighting poverty.

UHCAN Ohio opposes Senate Bill 17 because it punishes working families and those who have lost their job due to no fault of their own. Senate Bill 17 creates needless barriers to Medicaid enrollment that prevents people from getting critical health care coverage. During times of crisis, leaders are looking for ways to support struggling neighbors. The General Assembly should instead create a benefit-bridge so workers and families with low-incomes can gain greater stability.

The Ohio Department of Medicaid estimated at least 18,000 people would lose health care coverage under the existing work reporting requirement waiver. Raising the exemption to age 65 and adding the other reporting barriers and penalties in Senate Bill 17 will greatly expand the number of people who lose care through Medicaid. The vast number of people losing or being denied Medicaid coverage will undoubtedly have worse health outcomes. They are unlikely to receive appropriate care after a pregnancy, preventive care, timely treatment, or access to a medical home.

The Ohio Department of Medicaid's own study of Group VIII Ohio Medicaid enrollees gets it right, health care coverage allows people to work. Preventing people from becoming and staying healthy harms their ability to obtain and keep a job. Dropping tens of thousands of people from health care coverage will hurt the health of our communities in a state that has rural and urban unemployment, some of the worst health outcomes in the nation, and significant racial health disparities.

Ohio may not intend to punish people who can't comply with the additional barriers and reporting requirements, but those who fail to correctly report their work, those unable to successfully report exemptions, and those who can't find work will be punished with the loss of critical health care benefits.

It is particularly insensitive to propose additional reporting requirements in the midst of a global pandemic that has killed nearly 17,000 Ohio residents. People with low-income and wage workers are especially vulnerable to the risks of contracting COVID-19 because they have no choice but to live in crowded housing with little or no possibility of social distancing. The mere



act of going to work increases the risks of infection, especially for low-wage workers who cannot work from home and who, too often, lack any benefits or health leave so they are forced to work themselves, or work alongside others who are ill. The pandemic has slowed the state and national economies; businesses are cutting staff or closing altogether. Unemployment is at an all-time high and wage worker are finding their hours are increasingly variable. This makes work reporting even more of a burden than ignores the realities of Ohio families with limited income.

Establishing barriers to Medicaid coverage is a despicable threat during a pandemic when access to health care is truly a life or death situation. Anyone losing Medicaid will be forced to defer or decline to get needed care, or go to hospital Emergency Rooms, the most expensive source of care. Hospitals will provide care, but without presumptive Medicaid eligibility, hospitals will not be reimbursed and patients will be pushed into debt.

Senate Bill 17's administrative barriers on Medicaid eligibility during a global multi-year pandemic demonstrates detachment from the lives of low-income Ohioans and the conditions they have to navigate every day. Work reporting requirements and other barriers to Medicaid enrollment is bad policy and should be rejected firmly and finally.