



Virginia MIRC &lt;vamirc@mirc.virginia.gov&gt;

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**Medicaid Expansion**

1 message

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**Larry Harley** [REDACTED]  
To: "vamirc@mirc.virginia.gov" <vamirc@mirc.virginia.gov>

Mon, Oct 14, 2013 at 12:37 PM

Please permit me to submit a public comment concerning expansion of Medicaid.

I attempted to upload my comment to the public comments page, but received multiple error messages.

Thank you very much,

Larry T. Harley

Larry T. Harley, Executive Director  
Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society

[REDACTED]

Marion, VA [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Medicaid Expansion Public Comment.pdf**  
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When I was a younger person I was a faithful fan of the television show *Wild Kingdom*. One of that shows co-stars, Stan Brock, lived in the Amazon rain forest for fifteen years prior to the popular television series. Because of that experience, he vowed to find a way to deliver basic medical care to people in inaccessible areas. When his stint on *Wild Kingdom* came to an end, Brock founded Remote Area Medical (RAM).

In 2003 RAM conducted eighteen expeditions to provide free medical care to people in remote regions. Relying upon volunteer healthcare professionals, they provide free basic healthcare for people who otherwise would go without, people suffering from easily preventable conditions. They conducted two expeditions to India, one each to Nepal, Guyana, and Honduras. They also conducted two expeditions to southwestern Virginia.

I don't often think of my home region as resembling a third-world country, but these RAM expeditions cast us in such a light. Since 2003 RAM has conducted two expeditions a year to southwestern Virginia. On a typical expedition the RAM volunteers will treat 2,500 to 3,000 people over a weekend. The demand for services is so great that prospective patients begin gathering at midnight outside the county fairgrounds in order to be assigned a number that permits entry the following morning for processing in one of the large barns on site. Typically, by 6:00 AM all of the numbers have been given out and some are turned away.

But the RAM expeditions are here only two weekends a year. Since so many in our region have no health insurance they are forced to seek routine medical care in the only place they can gain access, hospital emergency rooms. This results in many low-income families running up enormous hospital bills for routine healthcare.....bills that they are unable to pay. Since 2003 Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society has represented over 1,200 families in bankruptcy proceedings, the vast majority of whom are forced into bankruptcy because of healthcare bills they are unable to pay. We've advised another 8,000 on bankruptcy and collections during the same period of time. Not only does this reflect the hardship on those without access to affordable healthcare, it also reflects the enormous drain on hospital emergency rooms and the hardship placed on healthcare providers in the private sector.

Like the Affordable Care Act or not, the Medicaid expansion that is part of the ACA offers a solution.....at least a partial solution.....to much of what confounds us as we confront lack of access to healthcare for low-income Virginians. Expansion of Medicaid will provide health insurance for roughly 400,000 uninsured Virginians, and will be paid for in large measure by the federal government.

It is, of course, our prerogative to forego the expansion of Medicaid, but if we do so we should at least have the courage and conviction to "call a spade a spade". Foregoing Medicaid expansion through the ACA is a declaration that we do not mind relegating many of our citizens to "third world" healthcare conditions, and that we are content to foist the burden of their healthcare upon our local hospital emergency rooms.

We are better than this. I urge you to recommend that Virginia adopt ACA Medicaid expansion.