

**Testimony – Ashley Forsberg, RN
Medicaid Expansion
Senate Hearing Room, Ground Floor, Boji Tower
124 West Allegan Street, Lansing
July 30, 2013**

Good morning. My name is Ashley Forsberg and I am a registered nurse at Sparrow Hospital here in Lansing.

Last night I found out that my friend has just discovered that she may have cancer. This is a woman who is already in debt from going back to school for her Masters. She does not have insurance. Her primary doctor wants her to get a biopsy of the mass and referred her for an urgent colonoscopy but having no other insurance other than county assistance, the specialist says they'll get her in when there's a cancellation. Meanwhile, she sits and waits worrying about her health and about how she can afford any treatment.

Why would you limit peoples' ability to get health care that they desperately need? My friend is not a freeloader. She works two jobs and is working on passing her boards to be an occupational therapist. How can you look at her or anybody with that diagnosis and tell her, "You have 48 months to pull yourself together."

She has no idea what the treatment will be, she knows she'll have to have surgery; she has no idea if she'll need chemotherapy or radiation. How is she going to pay for all that? Medicaid is the only resource. Meanwhile, she may be watching her life slipping away and all she can do is wait and worry. In 2007, 62% of bankruptcies were tied to medical expenses and that number continues to rise.¹

A new study² that was done in the state of Washington found that people with cancer are twice as likely to file bankruptcy and that number is 10 times larger in the older population. My friend is 48 years old. Even if she is successful in beating the cancer, she will go into debt that she will never see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Many of your families probably shop at Wal-Mart, whose owners have more wealth than the bottom 40% of Americans.³ Did you know that full-time workers at Wal-Mart earn an average of \$8.81 an hour? Their benefits are so poor that many Wal-Mart employees are on public assistance.

So are you saying that the people who stock Wal-Mart's shelves and clean the floors and run the cash register are some of those people who need to "get back on their feet?" I assume they fit your definition of "able bodied."

All Medicaid expansion does is level the playing field between those of us who are lucky enough to work jobs that offer health care benefits and good salaries and the equally important Michigan residents who don't live in that world. Everyone in Michigan deserves the ability to receive medical care. The idea that people who have to choose between food and medicine should be expected to pay on an escalating scale for a basic right to health care is ridiculous. If they received a decent wage and health benefits, we wouldn't be having this conversation and we could use Medicaid for the people who actually need the help such as children or people with disabilities.

I invite you to come and spend 24 hours at any Emergency Department in this state and you'll discover that a completely different world exists than the one that you and I live in. You cannot imagine until you've seen it on a daily basis what hurting people in Michigan go through trying to find health care for themselves and their children.

I understand that one of your “solutions” is to have people make “less-costly” choices by going to an urgent care center rather than an emergency room.

You ask a person who’s on Medicaid how well that will work and they will burst into laughter and throw their hands into the air. Do you know why? There are no urgent care services in Lansing that even take Medicaid plus the ones that we have don’t stay open past 9:00 pm.

Right now, if you call a physician and tell them you’re on Medicaid, suddenly the physician isn’t taking new patients. It’s almost impossible to find a dentist who takes Medicaid patients. I have seen an increase in oral surgeries at the hospital because patients are not receiving oral care in our community.

You are congratulating yourselves that you’ve created a “plan written by Michiganders for Michiganders.” It’s pretty obvious that the Michiganders that I see are not the Michiganders you profess to know or understand. Do not assume that these people are looking for a handout. They’re not. They’re looking for hope.

¹McCarter, Joan. "Medical Bills Cause 62% of Bankruptcies." Daily Kos. January 5, 2005.
<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/01/05/1051848/-Medical-bills-cause-62-percent-of-nbsp-bankruptcies>

²Tavernise, Sbrina. "Washington Cancer Patients More Prone to Bankruptcy." May 16, 2013.
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/us/washington-cancer-patients-more-prone-to-bankruptcy.html?_r=1&

³Dumenco, Simon. "How Are We Supposed to Feel About Walmart? Other Than Bad?"
Advertising Age. July 22, 2013.

