

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 26, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell,

Today, we write to respectfully request that provisions to close the coverage gap in Medicaid non-expansion states through federal action be included as part of any package to improve health care and our economy. Underserved communities, communities of color, and communities who have suffered the most during the COVID-19 pandemic, must finally be prioritized. Closing the coverage gap and providing more Americans with quality, affordable health care coverage is the most effective policy to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities and would be a major step towards decreasing the high rates of uninsured Americans in non-expansion states.

We are pleased that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) offered the 12 non-expansion states, including Georgia, robust financial incentives to finally expand Medicaid coverage to all of the states' eligible residents. Under ARPA, states that choose to expand and take advantage of the incentives could close the coverage gap and provide affordable health care to 4.4 million low-income Americans, 60 percent of whom are individuals of color.¹ Unfortunately, it has become increasingly clear that doing the right thing has become politicized. While states have the ability to both provide for their constituents and reap financial benefits through Medicaid expansion, governors and state legislators continue to prioritize partisanship over health, and deny coverage to those who need it the most. It is our job to provide a solution towards the best path to coverage.

COVID-19 has not only ravaged the health of our country but it has also caused a huge economic downturn in many of our most vulnerable communities, one that resulted in historic rates of unemployment. Medicaid, a program created for the purpose of expanding access to health care to low-income children, families, people with disabilities, seniors, and other adults, has played a critical role as individuals face job losses and the loss of employer sponsored health coverage. Unfortunately, low-income adults in the 12 states that have not expanded Medicaid are unable to rely on coverage through this vital safety net program. The federal government, which already funded coverage for these individuals through the Affordable Care Act, has a responsibility to step in and help these citizens who have been left behind by their state leadership.

We cannot continue to allow Americans with low incomes to suffer any longer just because they live in a state that has been overcome by political obstruction. That is why we are currently working on legislation that will provide health coverage to those living in non-expansion states

¹ <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2021/05/marketplace-pulse-lets-close-the-coverage-gap.html>

who have been denied access to affordable and quality health care. This could be done by creating a federal Medicaid look-alike program that is run through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), or pursuing other strategies that would provide coverage to beneficiaries in the coverage gap. To ensure that equity is at the core of this program, as the coverage gap disproportionately affects Black and brown individuals, this legislation should ensure there are no premiums and limited cost-sharing, just as enrollees would have had their states expanded Medicaid. In addition, while we must close the coverage gap, this legislation must protect state incentives to expand Medicaid to ensure that low-income Americans continue to have access to the comprehensive and quality coverage provided through Medicaid.

Now is the time for action. We have a duty to our constituents and a duty to those suffering from a lack of access to health care to provide for them when they are in need. We can no longer wait for states to find a sense of morality and must step in to close the coverage gap and finally ensure that all low- and middle-income Americans have access to quality, affordable health care.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator