

May 26, 2020

Senate Finance Committee
Colorado General Assembly
200 E. Colfax Ave. Denver, CO 80203

RE: Support for HB20-1236 Health Care Coverage Easy Enrollment Program

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Children's Hospital Colorado writes in support of House Bill 1236. Thank you for accepting written testimony and many thanks to the sponsors and advocates for all their work on this important proposal to improve coverage and health for Coloradans.

At the start of the year, 75,000 fewer children in Colorado had insurance through Medicaid than did in 2017. This drop in Medicaid coverage has not been completely offset by those kids being covered by private, Exchange, or employer-sponsored insurance – so we are concerned about an uptick in the uninsured rate among children in the state. The COVID-19 pandemic has called extra attention to the importance of maximizing health insurance coverage for children and families in our state.

Children's Hospital Colorado works to connect families with coverage, but it is much better and less expensive if kids can have coverage and be getting regular, preventive care rather than coming to a hospital in an emergency and the family then working to get coverage after the fact.

The uninsured rate among children in Colorado increased from 2.5% in 2015 to 4.3% in 2019. Children's Hospital Colorado's emergency department had a 2.5% percent increase in uninsured pediatric patients during the first half of 2019, compared to the same period in 2018. A number of independent pediatric primary care practices report significant increases in the number of uninsured kids in the previous year or two, as well.

We are supporting House Bill 1236, the "Easy Enrollment" bill, to make it simpler for families to get connected with health coverage through the Exchange or Medicaid in Colorado. We believe this is one tool that can help to address this trend. This is a time when it is especially important to think about creative, low-cost ways to connect families with coverage.

When a family files their state income tax return, they would voluntarily be able to ask the Exchange to figure out whether anyone who is uninsured in their household is eligible for free or affordable health insurance coverage. If a person or family has chosen to have their insurance

eligibility assessed, then they would get information about what options they have for coverage, as well as receiving help navigating the enrollment process.

Recent analysis indicated that there are over 20,000 uninsured children that qualify for Medicaid coverage in Colorado but are not presently enrolled. On top of that, there are many children who qualify for the Children's Health Insurance Program, or for federally subsidized Exchange coverage.

We hope the Committee will be able to support House Bill 1236 to facilitate stronger health insurance enrollment for Colorado kids and families.

Thank you very much for accepting written testimony, and please reach out with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kevin J.D. Wilson
Senior Policy Coordinator
Children's Hospital Colorado

720-777-2892

Kevin.Wilson@childrenscolorado.org



4600 South Ulster Street | Suite 300
Denver, CO 80237

May 26, 2020

The Honorable Julie Gonzales
Senate Finance Chair
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Pete Lee
Senate Finance Vice Chair
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Chris Hansen
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Paul Lundeen
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Jack Tate
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Nancy Todd
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Rob Woodward
Colorado State Senate
Denver, CO 80203

Re: House Bill 20-1236 Health Care Coverage Easy Enrollment Program

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

In 2011, five years after the innovative Blue Ribbon Commission, Connect for Health Colorado was established by the General Assembly as a public, non-profit entity to create a health insurance marketplace. In short, we were built *by* Coloradans and *for* Coloradans.

We opened for business in 2013, with a mission to **increase access, affordability and choice for individuals, families and small employers** all across Colorado who purchase health insurance and get financial help to reduce their costs.

The goal of this bill is to reduce the number of Coloradans who are uninsured, particularly those eligible for financial help. While this was an important goal when the bill was introduced in February, it is even more critical now.

Measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus have resulted in widespread, unprecedented levels of unemployment. As such, **portable insurance is even more necessary to protect Coloradans' health and shield them from financial crises in a**

health emergency. Easy Enrollment would make it easier for Coloradans who have lost employer-sponsored insurance to connect to coverage options in the individual market via the Exchange.

By connecting residents to affordable, comprehensive health coverage, Easy Enrollment would ultimately **provide financial stability and improve health outcomes**, especially in light of the public health emergency.

Increased health coverage enrollments resulting from Easy Enrollment would also:

- Provide Coloradans with access to diagnostics and treatment needed to identify and care for COVID -19 and other health conditions.
- Improve the ability of health insurance companies to identify and coordinate care for patients with COVID -19 and other health conditions.
- Protect Coloradans against financial hardship brought about by a health emergency.
- Reduce uncompensated care costs, which can increase health care costs in the market, especially in rural areas.

We know this is the right policy for Coloradans, and as such, we plan to assume the startup and operational costs for this initiative. We based our estimated costs on similar projects we have completed at both the federal and/or state level to set up secure data interfaces. We commit to resource this work without any requests for state funds.

The proposed Easy Enrollment process is designed to maximize the **information and help** provided to eligible Coloradans who opt-in so they can **understand all the coverage options available to them** as individuals and families. That means that even if someone does not qualify at tax filing time, or if they are eligible for Medicaid/CHP+, we will ensure they understand their options for next open enrollment.

We are absolutely committed to assisting the Medicaid/CHP+ eligible population access services with the state and will continue to work with the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing so that the state can finalize the eligibility determination for them.

Only the Department of Revenue and Connect for Health will have access to individuals' tax information. We will continue to maintain our current privacy/security procedures as governed by the IRS and CMS. These include data and security regulations for Personally

Identifiable Information (PII), Federal Tax Information (FTI), and Protected Health Information (PHI).

At Connect for Health, we've also invested in technology that modernizes our customer platform, so we're **fully prepared to implement innovative programs** such as that outlined in this Easy Enrollment bill.

Easy Enrollment prepares our state for the future even further; by updating the policy infrastructure, we can connect Coloradans to critically needed, affordable health coverage in the event of a future pandemic. The Maryland Exchange, which implemented a similar bill in 2020, successfully enrolled tens of thousands more people this spring as a result of an Easy Enrollment system.

The **collaborative nature** of how this bill was developed increases its success. Like our Board of Directors, this legislation is bipartisan. An additional benefit is the **advisory committee**, where we not only work alongside state partners, but it also includes other key representatives from the healthcare ecosystem including customers, carriers, consumer advocates, brokers and assisters. This contributes to implementing an efficacious program with meaningful outcomes.

Finally, we're excited to **forge a partnership** with the Department of Revenue. These creative partnerships with other agencies are a valuable way for us to work together in fulfillment of our mission to **increase access, affordability and choice for Coloradans**.

We are committed to that mission. To ensuring **we meet the needs of Coloradans** who are looking for affordable health coverage and to maximizing the benefits of this program.

We urge you to vote in support of this bill and stand ready to implement it.

Sincerely,
Monica VanBuskirk
Chief Policy and Relationships Officer
Connect for Health Colorado



May 26, 2020

Senate Finance Committee
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203
Via Email: RE: House Bill 20-1236

Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Colorado Hospital Association (CHA) submits written testimony in support of House Bill (HB) 20-1236, Health Care Coverage Easy Enrollment Program. CHA represents more than 100 hospitals and health systems in the state of Colorado and has a long history of supporting efforts to increase health insurance coverage and health care access, including support for Medicaid expansion. With many Coloradans losing employer-sponsored health insurance coverage and more than 500,000 individuals estimated to qualify for Medicaid coverage in the next six months, low-cost, commonsense actions that simply efforts to enroll in health insurance coverage in the coming years will be critical in ensuring Coloradans do not forgo necessary health care services.

According to a 2018 study by the Colorado Health Institute, more than half of the 360,000 uninsured Coloradans qualify for public health insurance programs or advance premium tax credits. HB 20-1236 offers a sensible approach to further reduce Colorado's uninsured rate and will have a positive impact on Coloradans. Specifically, research shows that individuals with health insurance coverage:

- are more likely to seek preventative care;
- have a better health status; and,
- are less likely to use expensive emergency services.

CHA also supports this bill because of it's potential to reduce enrollment complexities and overall health care costs to the system and to individuals. The Association thanks the bill sponsors, as well as the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, for bringing legislation forward and for their work to increase health insurance coverage for Coloradans.

CHA urges Senate Finance Committee members to support HB 20-1236 and thanks committee members for consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lila Cummings', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Lila Cummings
Manager of Public Policy
Colorado Hospital Association



Madam Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy submits this written testimony in support of HB20-1236. The bill aims to maximize enrollment in health coverage by creating a streamlined path to coverage that starts with the filing of an income tax return.

As a result of the bill, tax filers will be able to indicate on their tax form that they want their information to be shared with Connect for Health Colorado so the exchange can assess the eligibility of their uninsured family members for Medicaid, CHP+, or subsidized private coverage. The exchange will then be required reach out to those individuals and help them enroll in any free or reduced-cost program for which they qualify.

Easy enrollment is a proven approach to increasing enrollment in coverage. The state of Maryland just implemented easy enrollment and, while other direct-mail efforts focused on reaching uninsured individuals enroll about 1% of those contacted, Maryland's easy enrollment program increased that success rate by seven times. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, it was estimated that 215,000 uninsured Coloradans that qualified for a free or reduced cost coverage program could be reached through tax returns. If 7% of those Coloradans are enrolled in coverage through easy enrollment that would mean 15,000 more Coloradans covered.

The economic upheaval caused by COVID-19 only highlights the importance of creating this pathway to coverage. As a result of the crisis, unemployment in Colorado surpassed 11% in April and, for the same month, rose above 20% in some of our mountain communities. Job loss also means loss of insurance for many and, in many more cases, people become eligible for unfamiliar programs with the loss of income. At the same time, the stress of financial crisis makes navigating our complex health coverage system even more difficult. Many families simply do not have enough bandwidth deal with health insurance when they are trying to find a new job and ensure more basic needs like food and housing are met.

But coverage is critical to general wellbeing and to ensuring families have what they need to weather hard times. For people with low incomes, just having health insurance reduces rates of depression, eviction, and bankruptcy. And kids in families with low incomes, who have publicly financed coverage, are more likely to finish high school, graduate from college and have higher incomes as adults. More generally, coverage supports access to health care and protects against medical debt. With these needs met, Coloradans can focus on finding work and building economic security.

Maximizing enrollment in coverage has important systemic benefits as well. Maximizing Medicaid and CHP+ enrollment will provide important financial relief to primary care clinics and rural hospitals. Colorado's safety net providers were already facing revenue challenges before COVID-19. And limitations on primary care access and elective procedures due to the coronavirus outbreak is now

putting many providers in jeopardy of closing. Medicaid and CHP+ revenues will be critical in keeping our safety net providers afloat as we recover from the crisis. Getting more Coloradans covered will also minimize the amount of care provided by our hospitals that goes uncompensated, which will help hospitals recover from the current crisis and withstand future shocks.

In addition, maximizing enrollment in subsidized plans will help Colorado meet budget priorities amid a state budget crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak. If more Coloradans qualify for tax credits for private insurance, Colorado will have access to additional federal funds for state priorities, like reinsurance, that can reduce health care costs for all through premium reduction.

HB20-1236 was developed in close collaboration with the Department of Revenue and Connect for Health Colorado and enjoys support from across the spectrum of health care stakeholders – from hospitals, to the insurance exchange, to carriers, to consumer advocates. We also worked closely with Maryland partners to model their program and learn from their implementation process. Please vote yes, in favor of advancing HB20-1236.

Contact:

Allison Neswood, Esq.

Deputy Director of Strategic Priorities

aneswood@cclponline.org

505-228-8390 (cell)



May 26, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for taking written testimony. I am submitting this note in support of House Bill 1236 – Health Care Coverage Easy Enrollment Program on behalf of Colorado Community Health Network, the association for Colorado’s Federally Qualified Health Centers, also known as Community Health Centers (CHCs).

Colorado has 20 CHCs with more than 200 clinic sites across the state. CHCs are the health care home to more than 830,000 Coloradans from 63 of the state’s 64 counties. CHCs provide integrated primary care – which means they offer physical health care integrated with behavioral health and oral health care in the same setting. CHCs serve people regardless of their ability to pay.

The vast majority of patients who get their health care at CHCs are living in, or close, to poverty – 92% are below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Historically, CHCs have had a relatively balanced mix of patients who have coverage – mostly through Medicaid – and who are uninsured. Over the past several years, CHCs have been seeing a trend of fewer people covered by Medicaid and more people going uninsured. In fact, Colorado CHCs saw a 10% increase in uninsured patients in 2018, and a 9% increase in 2019. CHCs now provide primary care to 40% of the state’s uninsured.

This increase in uninsured patients at CHCs is affecting their bottom line and put some of them in a precarious financial position as they have pivoted to meet the needs of their patients during this public health crisis. While CHCs do everything they can to help their community members enroll in the health coverage that is right for them, we want to find more solutions to help Coloradans get connected to health coverage. Colorado Community Health Network sees the easy enrollment program, proposed by House Bill 1236, as one piece of the solution.

This bill would make it easier for people who file tax returns with the state to find out they are eligible for a coverage program like Medicaid, Child Health Plan Plus, or through Connect for Health Colorado. And it would help streamline the enrollment process so that hardworking, busy, families, and those who have had coverage disrupted due to the COVID-19 crisis, can more easily get covered. Connecting health coverage enrollment with tax filing is also a common-sense link between two important, but sometimes onerous tasks for busy families.

I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for your time, and your support of CHC patients.

Thank you,

Stephanie Brooks
Policy Director
Colorado Community Health Network