



GONGWER Ohio
The Record of Capitol Square Since 1906

Ohio Veterans Push For Medicaid Support; Advocates Say Expansion Would Benefit Service Members

Ohio veterans urged state lawmakers Monday to "not delay" action on Medicaid expansion legislation, which could cover an estimated 26,000 former service men and women who currently lack health insurance.

Speaking at a news conference at the Franklin County Veterans Memorial in Columbus, Adjutant General Deborah Ashenhurst and Department of Veterans Services Director Tom Moe, joined veterans in voicing support for extending Medicaid coverage up to 138% of the federal poverty level.

According to Ms. Ashenhurst, such a policy would benefit members of the National Guard who are unable to get health insurance coverage upon their return home and loss of military health benefits.

At any time an estimated 450-550 National Guard service men and women go without health insurance, but would be covered under expansion, she added.

Ohio's service members should be in a constant "state of readiness," Ms. Ashenhurst stressed, meaning that they are healthy enough to be deployed, if needed.

Pointing to the support veterans receive from various non-military affiliated organizations across Ohio, she questioned why the state doesn't make similar efforts.

"If organizations with no direct affiliation to or any opportunity to benefit from helping our vets and our military members, why would we not want the state of Ohio to provide extended coverage that would benefit these same citizens?" she said. "The proposed reform of (Medicaid) would offer some relief to those service members who have given so much."

Director Moe, meanwhile, stressed that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs does not provide health insurance benefits to every veteran, leaving many without access to mental health and other needed services.

"We are seeing an unprecedented number of suicides among our veterans population: who would deny support to our fellow citizens who step forward to serve their country?" he asked. "According to the most recent statistics, the VA estimated that this ultimate act was taken every day on average by 22 of our veterans nationwide."

More than half of the veterans who committed suicide in 2012, the VA found, fell outside the agency's health care network, Mr. Moe added.

Medicaid expansion, as proposed by [Gov. John Kasich](#), would help cut down on the rate of veteran suicides - particularly among Ohio females who are twice as likely to take their lives compared to their civilian counterparts, he said.

The director stressed that moving forward with expansion would represent a "hand up," not a "hand out" for Ohio's veterans.

"They were there for us, isn't it right for us to be there for them now?" Director Moe emphasized. Commander of Cleveland's American Legion Post 315 Frank Miller Jr. and Ohio National Guard Association advocate Victor Wilson also called-on lawmakers to support the policy initiative.

Mark Davis, president of the Ohio Provider Resource Association who also spoke at the event, said while there has been little feedback from lawmakers on the impact Medicaid expansion could have on Ohio's veterans, Gov. Kasich and his administration have been very cognizant and supportive of the issue.

Under the governor's original budget proposal an estimated 275,000 Ohioans would be newly eligible for Medicaid coverage, as the limits for childless adults would be extended.

The measure, which has sparked tensions in the legislature, was removed by House lawmakers prior to the chamber's passage of the legislation. The Senate, which is poised to unveil and vote on its version of the budget bill this week, previously announced its intention to keep the measure separate.

http://www.gongwer-oh.com/programming/news.cfm?article_ID=821060207

© 2013 Gongwer News Service, Inc.