

Hello, my name is Peter Wolfgram. I am a registered pharmacist in Montana and the owner of 4 independent retail pharmacies – two in Butte, one in Townsend and one in WSS. I wanted to take a few minutes to speak to you all in support of SB 324.

In my opinion there are really three main reasons to vote in favor of this bill. First, as a healthcare provider I want to be able to help all the people in the communities I serve have access to affordable medications. Unfortunately, a lot of my potential customers are either self-employed or employed by small businesses. Small employers are less likely to be able to offer health insurance, as the premiums are prohibitively expensive.

- 19% of ALL Montanans are uninsured
- Approximately 32% of all Montanans work for Small employers and according to national statistics up to 30% of all employees of small firms are uninsured. (Families USA, Montana Uninsured)
- Fully 48% of Montana's working poor are uninsured

I am able to offer health insurance to my employees, but I am the exception, not the rule.

Second, by working to develop a plan for patient access to affordable medications utilizing the already existing pharmacies in Montana, we keep **business** in Montana. The majority of pharmacies (55%) in Montana are independently owned and operated. These 118 independent pharmacies employ approximately 800 Montanans. These stores have approximately \$175 million dollars worth of sales, on which they pay corporate income tax. They support local communities and rely on the local communities to support their businesses and in turn support the state of Montana. (NACDS industry profile.)

Finally, by helping provide access to affordable medications in our communities, we help improve patient safety. Without access to these medications, many Montanans face a tough choice: go without, skip medication doses, or buy from less reputable sources. Going without or skipping medication just puts more burden on the healthcare system. According to the National Pharmaceutical Council, Noncompliance is the cause of 10 percent of hospital admissions, and results in more than 125,000 deaths in the United States each year. Further, purchasing medications from unknown sources is also potentially dangerous. A survey conducted in 2003 by the FDA found serious problems with medications mailed into the US due to "lack of safety assurances, effectiveness, quality and purity".

I applaud Senator Tester for supporting affordable healthcare in Montana and especially for supporting small pharmacies in Montana. I urge the committee to vote for SB 324.