

1/14/2011

Dear Chairman Roberts and members of the Joint Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Stacey McClure, I am a mother of two in Lolo, Montana and a home visiting Parent educator at Women's Opportunity Resource Development Inc. I am writing to you to urge you to be thoughtful in what ever budget cuts you make, if any. While I understand that our current economy requires us to take a critical look at programs, I also know that the very lives of your constituents depend on the full funding of those programs.

My family has been participating in the Healthy Montana Kids program since its beginning in October 2009. With the passing of I-155, our children became eligible for health insurance because we were unable to afford it on our own. Prior to the passing of HMK our children had been uninsured for 2 years. In that time we just hoped and prayed that we would not experience an emergency.

Since receiving HMK, we have been able to seek diagnosis and treatment for our youngest son, Royce. He has been experiencing educational delays in reading and writing. These delays significantly impair his learning and Royce is attending the second grade for the second time this year.

Without diagnosis and treatment, his daily learning would be challenged by a neurological disorder. With the combination of HMK insurance and a positive educational team, we have been able to individualize his learning environment, and provide him with intensive services.

Prior to HMK, he was receiving services at school, but we were not seeing the improvements expected. Now he is beginning to read signs when we are in the car, and asking questions about words he sees. Literacy is foundational to a strong, thriving, and working economy. Royce is becoming a child who will learn to read and succeed in both school and life as he grows thanks to quality education and medication. We would not be able to provide him with this opportunity had it not been for the people of Montana prioritizing health care for children.

Royce is not alone. In my work as a home visiting Parent Educator I see many families struggling to make ends meet. Most families are experiencing homelessness, lack of transportation, many have been laid off work, and many are minimum wage earners trying to keep their families afloat. These families depend on health care services like Healthy Montana Kids to ensure that they can care for their children's mental and physical needs. When children are healthy, parents are able to spend time applying for better paying jobs and take steps to improve their financial lives. A number of families I work with have actually lost jobs due to sick children. When this happens, whatever

amount of security the family had gets whipped out, but at least with HMK they know they can count on being able to care for the child's basic health needs.

I know that the enrollment in HMK has not been as high as quickly as expected. I suggest looking into the implementation of this program and working to ensure that families in MT have access to this program. At WORD we hear of long waits for application approval, and confusion about the application process. In addition, more could be done to ensure that presumptive eligibility is happening to ensure that eligible children who walk into a health clinic or emergency room are indeed getting the services they qualify for.

Please do not make broad cuts to health care or education for children with out taking children like Royce into consideration. He depends on you to ensure that he has the opportunities to succeed. The economic future of Montana depends on you now to invest in the health and educational opportunities of our future leaders, business owners, and employees. Montanans depend on you to uphold the priority that they set for children's health care.

Thank you,

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