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DATE 4/15/13

SB 395

Testimony on

HB395

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee
My Name is Jim Higgins and I'm here representing the Enlisted and
Officer Associations of the Montana National Guard.

I am also a Veteran of 33 years, retiring in 2001 and residing in Libby
MT.

My purpose in speaking here today is to support Montana Veterans and
in particular Montana National Guard Veterans.

We are told that Medicaid Expansion will provide the opportunity for
medical care to 9000 Montana Veterans.

Several thousand young Montana Guardsmen are veterans based on
Montana code definition of veterans and Medicaid expansion can
provide a 2nd source of care without any age limit. It can serve their
spouses as well if they meet the income limits which are \$15,856 and
\$21,403.

I am deeply concerned about this new generation of veterans. The VA is
getting better but it still can be weeks or months to process claims.
Nationwide, there is a huge backlog and access in rural Montana is
sketchy at best.

Medicaid expansion in some form is good for Montana veterans, young
and old, because it provides a 2nd option, often closer to home. Young
veterans are struggling to find jobs, are often underemployed, or trying
to get an education. At times they need medical help to adjust and bring
normalcy to their life. They have given a lot, now it's time to give back.

I spent this weekend at the Enlisted Association of The National Guard
of Montana annual conference. In the course of discussion I was told
there are instances of National Guardsmen volunteering for deployments

so they could have access to health insurance for themselves and family. They volunteer for other reasons but they cite the need for insurance as a major driver in their decision. Many of these young men and women don't have injuries, and if they live miles away from a VA facility, may decide not to travel for routine medical care for themselves. This care expires 5 years after their deployment and their families have no coverage from VA in any case. There is a Tricare insurance program available to them but if they are unemployed, underemployed or attending school, they may not be able to afford the premiums

Let's pass this bill.

SB 395

Respectfully
James W. Higgins