

Temple Emanu-El Advocacy Statement on Medicaid Expansion

Approved by Temple Emanu-El Board of Trustees: March 10, 2021

Introduction

The Advocacy Team sought approval from the Board of Trustees to educate Texas elected officials and advocate for the expansion of Medicaid in our state under the Affordable Care Act.

Overview

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed everything in how we live and work. Many people have lost their jobs and their health insurance. Many families have never had health insurance, either because their employers do not provide it, or they cannot afford to purchase it. Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) states were incentivized to expand their Medicaid programs. Texas is only one of 12 states that has not expanded its program even though the Federal government will pay for 90% of its cost. In years past, those in political power rejected the opportunity for Texas to expand its Medicaid program. However, this year, many people and organizations believe that the changed circumstances brought on by the pandemic and a difficult economy have led to a softening of the opposition to such expansion. For example, former Speaker of the House, Joe Strauss, now supports Medicaid expansion, and State Representative Morgan Meyer, who represents many of Temple's members, indicated that he would support some expansion of the program. State Senator Nathan Johnson (also representing many Temple members) proposed several bills that would expand health care access to many more Texans as well. We have attached the RAC-TX "Issues Write-Up" that discusses in greater detail the merits of expanding health care access to the many Texans who are without adequate access to healthcare.

Our Values

Our Jewish values place the highest value on the preservation of human life for all people, and the highest duty of Tikkun Olam - making our society a fairer and more just one. A recently published article in the on-line Reform Judaism.org newsletter (reformjudaism.org/Jewish-views-health-care) reminded us that "providing health care is not just an obligation for the patient and the doctor, but society as well. For this reason, the revered Jewish scholar Maimonides listed health care first on his list of the 10 most important communal services that a city must offer its residents (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV:23)."

Advocating for an expansion of health care access for people who are uninsured or do not have the ability to afford health care services should be a high calling for our congregation. In the past, Temple has been active in helping people obtain health insurance. After the passage of the ACA, Temple helped many people apply for ACA coverage. In 2010 Temple as part of Dallas Area Interfaith organized a Durable Medical Equipment Exchange. This program endures today as its own 501(c)(3) organization, collecting, refurbishing, and distributing medical devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes, hospital beds to residents of Dallas County who meet eligibility requirements.

Our Advocacy

There have been many bills filed that would expand Medicaid or provide greater access to healthcare in our state. Some of the bills call for a complete expansion, while others have a narrower focus such as expanding Medicaid to infants for more than the current two months from birth, or expanding the program to women 12- or 24-months post-partum, or creation of a “buy-in” program for those who are not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid but have insufficient funds to come within the ACA provisions. These are all bills we would like to support.

While historically many political leaders have indicated their reluctance to accept the Federal program because of its potential cost, there have been analyses that indicate that the 10% cost that the state would have to fund would be mitigated by significant savings in other areas of the state budget that would mitigate against the costs. For example, there would be a reduced cost for “uncompensated” care that public hospitals and local taxpayers bear the cost of. There would be a reduction in the health costs provided to those incarcerated in Texas correctional institutions. An indirect positive effect of expanded health care access would result in an expansion of the labor market for medical care professionals and techs. Obviously more people with affordable access to care will result in the need for more nurses, hospital workers, lab techs, physicians and physician assistants.

In addition to the fiscal benefits of the expansion, there will be better control over infectious and chronic diseases. People who are sick will seek medical care sooner and more consistently, leading to less need for emergency and critical care and improving the outcomes of medical treatment. Most importantly, supporting the expansion of health care to those who lack adequate access to care is the right thing to do and presents a moral imperative for our Jewish community.

Affinity Advocacy Organizations

We believe that Temple should join with other reputable like-minded organizations to pursue its advocacy in support of expanded health care access/Medicaid expansion. Every Texan (formerly Center for Public Policy Priorities), Texas Impact, Faith Commons and other organizations focused on advocacy have begun to develop strategy and advocacy before our legislature. We believe that joining with these other organizations will amplify our voice on this important moral issue. It is also important to note that both the Texas Medical Association and the Texas Hospital Association are advocating for Medicaid expansion in the current legislative session, along with many other health care associations.

Conclusion

We believe that our advocacy along with other strategic partners will give Temple a genuine opportunity to influence public policy that is consistent with our Jewish values.