

Utahns Rally for More Medicaid Coverage

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By [Andrea Smardon](#) 11-20-13



Credit Andrea Smardon - Utah religious leaders stand by their letter asking Governor Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid in Utah.

Utah Governor Gary Herbert received letters Wednesday from those encouraging him to expand Medicaid and provide health insurance to more low-income citizens in the state. Medical groups, religious groups, and advocates for the poor filled the rotunda at the capitol asking the Governor and their state representatives to rise above politics in making this decision.

On behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, Reverend Canon Mary June Nestler reads from a letter to Governor Herbert.

“We respectfully ask that you lead us in finding the way to expand Medicaid that fits Utah, and reaches the thousands of our neighbors who are in desperate need of medical care,” Nestler reads.

The letter was signed by more than 100 faith leaders in the state from different religious groups, though notably absent was anyone representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Steve Klemz, Pastor for Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, says it is a moral issue to provide health coverage for more than 123,000 uninsured Utahns.

“With all due respect to Governor Herbert, I really wish that we had moved from the political realm and moved to the moral realm, which is quite frankly a life and death situation with Medicaid expansion,” Klemz says.

Republican Senator Brian Shiozawa stood with many Democratic state representatives who attended the rally. Shiozawa - who is also an emergency room doctor - insisted that the expansion of Medicaid should not be a partisan issue.

“This is an issue that should cross party lines, and it’s something that we need to work together on and we shouldn’t be divided on. There are patients every day that I treat or cannot treat because they don’t have insurance, they won’t come in because they don’t have that access,” Shiozawa says.



Credit Andrea Smardon - 13-year-old Avery Pizzuto wrote a letter to the Governor asking him to expand Medicaid so that her mother could have health insurance.

13-year-old Avery Pizzuto made a personal plea on behalf of her mother. Pizzuto herself has Type 1 diabetes, but she has health insurance to cover her treatment. Her single mother, who was previously diagnosed with cancer - has no insurance.

“I know that I am only 13 years old, but I’ve gone through a lot and don’t want anything else to happen to my mom. Please make it possible for my mom to have insurance so she can take care of herself, so she can be around with me and my sisters. It would take a huge burden off my shoulders knowing that if she ever gets sick again she can get the care that she needs,” Pizzuto says, as the crowd applauds.

Governor Gary Herbert has said that he expects to make a decision on whether to expand Medicaid by the end of the year.