

Lawmakers, Advocates Consider Limited Medicaid Expansion Plan

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Link: <http://kuer.org/post/lawmakers-advocates-consider-limited-medicaid-expansion-plan>

A House committee approved a limited Medicaid expansion bill Monday afternoon, but health care advocates around the state are not all unified in support.

House Bill 437 would give Medicaid benefits to those in extreme poverty in Utah. The bill's sponsor House Majority Leader Jim Dunnigan says it would cover a portion of those in the coverage gap, most of whom are either homeless, have a behavioral health issue, or are involved in the criminal justice system.

"I mean, if there is a group of Utahns that deserve our help and a hand up, it would be the group of Utahns that we're targeting in this legislation," Dunnigan says. "While I don't expect all the advocates to support it, many of the advocates are. There is bipartisan, broad-based support for this legislation."

The bill would cover about 16,000 people, which Dunnigan says is about a third of those who currently don't have any options for health coverage. Chase Thomas, Policy and Advocacy Director with Alliance for a Better Utah, says too many people are left out of Dunnigan's plan.

"For years now, we've been talking about how we need to fully cover the gap in Medicaid, and this only covers a few thousands out of the tens of thousands who would otherwise be covered," Thomas says.

That's one group strongly opposed, but numerous groups who were formerly in support of a full Medicaid expansion are considering supporting Dunnigan's bill. RyLee Curtis is senior analyst with Utah Health Policy Project, which is so far neutral on the bill. She says advocates are trying to balance their goals with what seems politically realistic.

"They're falling into different camps," Curtis says. "Some are opposing this bill, some are neutral on this bill, and some are supporting it for reason of getting something started."

Curtis says with less than two weeks left of the session, there are still a lot of questions about the bill, like where the funding will come from, what it does and doesn't do, who is included and who is left out.