

Link: <http://kuer.org/post/health-reform-still-stalled-utah>

Audio: http://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2014/08/HEALTHREFORM_web.mp3



Charlotte Lawrence testifies along with her children to the Utah Health Reform Task Force.

Health Reform Still Stalled in Utah

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Some conservative lawmakers are still resisting an expansion of Medicaid in Utah, despite testimony from those who can't afford health coverage and a new analysis showing the economic benefits of the governor's Healthy Utah proposal.

Charlotte Lawrence tried to contain her emotion as she sat before the state's health reform task force, with her children on either side. She explained that she is a single parent, working two full time jobs, and she has been diagnosed with cancer. She says she's done all she can to provide for herself and her family, but it's not enough.

"I have done everything," Lawrence says. "I recently just went bankrupt on \$196,000 in medical debt. Do you think a doctor even wants to see me now? When they offered me chemo because my margins came back unclear, I said how much does that cost? And when they told me what chemo and radiation was, I said, I can't afford it."

Republican Senator Allen Christensen from North Ogden is chair of the state task force. He says he feels for Lawrence and others like her, but he still does not believe expanding the role of government in healthcare is the answer.

"Where do I draw the line?" Christensen asks. "Do you want government to step in and take over her healthcare and be making those choices? Do you want the government to be everything to everyone?"

Brigham Young University Economics Professor Sven Wilson provided lawmakers with an independent [analysis](#) of the governor's Healthy Utah proposal. The governor wants to use Medicaid dollars to allow Utahns to buy insurance on the private market. Dr. Wilson concluded that the economic benefits far outweigh the costs, but he felt there were even more important benefits to consider that are harder to quantify.

“The crucial question here is not whether we can afford this plan or whether the financial risks are manageable or not,” Wilson said. “The question is whether those lives matter. The question is whether our democracy feels a moral obligation to provide a minimal safety net for those who are the least among us.”

Governor Gary Herbert says he is still negotiating with the federal government. The one sticking point that remains is whether the state can include work requirements for health coverage. He expects to wrap up negotiations in the next month, but even if he succeeds there, the question remains, will he have the support of his fellow state lawmakers?