

March 20, 2020

Governor Brian Kemp
206 Washington Street
State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Kemp,

Thank you for your leadership and service to all Georgians as you lead the state's response to the novel coronavirus COVID-19. We appreciate your efforts to clearly communicate with members of the Georgia public, coordinate the efforts of health care providers, public health agencies, and other parts of the health care system, establish isolation locations and protocols, and otherwise effectively respond to this unprecedented health crisis. We are enthusiastic partners in your efforts and will continue to lend our full support in order to protect and address the health of Georgians.

We write to you today in an effort to ensure our collective efforts to address this pandemic are as successful as possible. **So that as many Georgians as possible have access to needed health care services during this critical time, we urge you to act immediately to extend health insurance coverage to all low-income Georgia adults.**

More than one-quarter of low-income Georgians are uninsured and many are at risk of losing it as a result of the virus.ⁱ Our uninsured friends, family members, and neighbors have little access to the health care system and are often hesitant to seek care when they get sick except in emergency or other serious circumstances. They are likely to work in sectors of the economy in which they interact directly with large groups of people and in jobs that cannot be done remotely, like childcare, food service, retail, health care (including in-home care for seniors and people with disabilities), and construction.

The spread of COVID-19 can be most effectively slowed when all Georgians can easily and affordably seek testing and care if they experience symptoms or meet the testing criteria established by the CDC. Therefore, it is imperative that as many Georgians as possible have health insurance that facilitates access to care and protects consumers' finances. For forty percent of uninsured Georgians (567,000 Georgians), that can quickly be accomplished by extending Medicaid coverage to all adults up to 138 percent of the federal poverty line.ⁱⁱ This response by your administration would provide low-income Georgians the flexibility and financial protection to needed during this unprecedented health crisis.

In addition to swiftly increasing the number of Georgians with insurance coverage, this move would promote the state's current response plans by reducing the amount of free care provided by hospitals and other providers, preserving critical hospital resources and

capacity for true emergency care and critical COVID-19 cases. Because low-income Georgians are largely locked out of other entries to the health care system, they often seek care in emergency rooms where they know they cannot be turned away. Providing non-urgent medical care in emergency rooms during this time drains critical resources from hospitals that could be more effectively used to screen and treat critical coronavirus cases.

The state would further benefit from the enhanced federal matching dollars (currently at 90%) it would receive for this expanded coverage.

Your immediate action to extend coverage to Georgians making up to 138 percent of the federal poverty line would deliver protective health insurance coverage to low-income Georgians during an unpredictable public health emergency and ensure that far fewer state residents confronting COVID-19 go untracked or untreated. This compassionate step is paramount to our state's successful protection of the health, wellness, and security of all Georgians.

To fully leverage Medicaid's benefits for Georgia's response, we additionally encourage your administration to invest in enrollment efforts for Georgians who are eligible, but unenrolled, consider administrative changes to preserve coverage for current Medicaid members, and explore flexibilities available to Georgia through a Section 1135 waiver. More than 187,000 Georgia adults and children currently qualify for Medicaid but are not enrolled.ⁱⁱⁱ Some are not enrolled because they are unaware of their eligibility, while others may be experiencing a lapse in coverage due to the renewal process. Promoting the enrollment of eligible individuals through an expansion of presumptive eligibility and targeted local outreach efforts, while also temporarily suspending the requirement for Georgia children and adults to renew their coverage would increase the number of Medicaid-covered Georgians, further enhancing our collective response efforts. Section 1135 waivers, among other benefits, offer our state the opportunity to temporarily grow Medicaid's provider network, increasing the health systems' response capacity.

We stand ready to support your administration in the execution of each of these recommendations. Please reach out to the undersigned organizations and infectious disease providers individually or collectively, as you see fit.

Sincerely,

American College of Physicians, Georgia
Chapter
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
Aniz, Inc.
Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals

Georgia Budget & Policy Institute
Georgia Equality
Georgia Nurses Association
Georgia Watch
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Georgia Primary Care Association

Georgia Interfaith Public Policy Center
Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition
of Georgia
Human Impact Project of Atlanta
Mental Health America of Georgia
Mercy Care

Metro Atlanta HIV/AIDS Health Services
Planning Council
National Alliance on Mental Illness,
Georgia
National Multiple Sclerosis Society,
Georgia
The PoZitive2poSitive Initiative

Infectious disease providers

Dr. Africa P. Alvarez-McLeod, MD MPH
FIDSA
Infectious Diseases
Southside Medical Center

Morris A. Singletary
Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health Services
Planning Council

Leisha McKinley-Beach
National HIV/AIDS Consultant

Donnamarie Wilson, FNP-C
Southside Medical Center

Mario Powell
CEO/President of TRI-CULTURE

Boomer O. Woods
THRIVE SS

Malcom Reid
Program Manager, The Silver
Lining Project

Cc: Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan
Speaker David Ralston
Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan
Senate Minority Leader Steve Henson
House Majority Leader Jon Burns
House Minority Leader Robert Trammell
Chairman Ben Watson
Chairwoman Sharon Cooper

i [Uninsured rates for Non-elderly by Federal Poverty Level](#), 2018, Kaiser Family Foundation.

ii [Georgia Environmental Scan Report, p. 17](#), Georgia Department of Community Health. July 8, 2019

iii [Distribution of Eligibility for ACA Health Coverage Among those Remaining Uninsured as of 2018](#), Kaiser Family Foundation.