



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

January 25, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

Welcome to Pennsylvania. I wanted to extend an invitation to you to witness the extraordinary work health care providers in Pennsylvania are doing to help those suffering from substance use disorder and the devastating toll this unprecedented public health crisis is having on Pennsylvania families and communities.

In my 2016-2017 budget, I expanded treatment options for Pennsylvanians struggling with substance use disorder. We created 45 Centers of Excellence throughout the commonwealth, which serve as central hubs that assist those with opioid use disorders with behavioral and physical health care, along with medication-assisted treatment, as needed.

A significant number of people accessing this treatment do so thanks to Medicaid coverage. Without that coverage, we could not offer these individuals treatment. I've done more than 30 roundtables and visits to these centers to meet those suffering – and those helping them. The people who do this work are heroes and the people who choose to enter treatment are bravely battling a devastating disease despite the physical and mental challenges.

I am respectfully requesting that you join me to visit a treatment center in Pennsylvania. In 2015, over 3,500 Pennsylvanians lost their lives to this terrible disease, and we expect the numbers for 2016 to be even higher. I will gladly adjust my schedule if you are available this week while you are in the state or, if you are available, I am already scheduled to visit a treatment center in Philadelphia next Monday, the 30th.

We can all agree that the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, is not perfect. However, the ACA allowed me to expand Medicaid here in Pennsylvania which gave almost 700,000 people insurance coverage. Through Medicaid expansion, 63,000 Pennsylvanians suffering from addiction accessed drug and alcohol treatment.

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If the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, is repealed and not replaced, over a million Pennsylvanians could lose access to health care and tens of thousands of people – people who are our friends, our neighbors, and our family members that are currently receiving treatment for a substance use disorder -- would lose insurance coverage and no longer be able to afford their treatment.

I also firmly believe that any replacement plan that further cuts Medicaid coverage for those suffering from substance use disorder would seriously jeopardize Pennsylvania's ability to provide services and treatment for patients struggling with the disease of addiction. Cutting funding to Medicaid would just force states like Pennsylvania into a horrible choice of which vulnerable populations to give access to care and which to leave helpless.

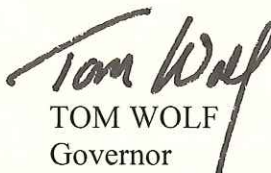
My greatest fear is that cuts to Medicaid and rationing of access to treatment by the federal government will set us back even further and more people will die as a result. This is not hyperbole – access to treatment through Medicaid is keeping Pennsylvanians alive who might otherwise face overdoses or worse.

The costs of seeing doctors and paying for medication for a substance use disorder could be thousands of dollars a month without insurance. Yet a single person who receives substance use disorder treatment through Pennsylvania's Medicaid expansion makes less than \$16,250 a year.

I have met with families and law enforcement across the commonwealth about this crisis. I have seen, first hand, the consequences this disease has on people and communities. Just last week, I met with Faith, a volunteer at Magee Hospital in Pittsburgh, who spends her time rocking newborn children to sleep who are suffering from opioid withdrawal. If we cannot find a way to help more Pennsylvanians with this disease, more infants will face such an unimaginable start to their lives.

I hope you can join me to see firsthand how this epidemic is hurting the state you visit this week and how access to treatment through Medicaid is keeping people alive.

Sincerely,


TOM WOLF
Governor