

Local Journalism Lives Here.
Just 99¢ for the first month.

LEARN MORE
([HTTP://OFFERS.GREENBAYPRESSGAZETTE.COM/SPECIALOFFER?](http://offers.greenbaypressgazette.com/specialoffer?GPS-SOURCE=BENBOCT&UTM_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM_SOURCE=BOUNCE-EXCHANGE&UTM_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17)
GPS-
SOURCE=BENBOCT&UTM_MEDIUM=NANOBAR&UTM_SOURCE=BOUNCE-
EXCHANGE&UTM_CAMPAIGN=READLOCAL17)

Medicaid cuts impact many | Column

John Jahnke, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 6:17 p.m. CT May 4, 2017



(Photo: John Jahnke)

Editor's note:

This essay was written before the House passed the American Health Care Act. U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Green Bay, voted for the bill, which now goes to the Senate.

For weeks now, a possible vote in Congress that would cut nearly \$900 billion from Medicaid has loomed over my family's life and the lives of nearly one in five people living in Wisconsin's 8th Congressional District.

That's why I reached out several weeks ago to Congressman Mike Gallagher for a personal meeting, knowing he had not yet confirmed how he intended to vote on the American Health Care Act, a bill that would repeal the Affordable Care Act and pay for it with a 25 percent cut to federal Medicaid over the next decade.

Let me explain why this issue is so critical to my son, who has autism and is non-verbal, and our family.

My son has benefited from Medicaid services from the Birth-to-3 program, which is a Medicaid-funded program that serves children with developmental delays. Later, my son was qualified for the Katie Beckett Waiver, which helps children with long-term disabilities and complex medical needs, including the purchase of specialized equipment and school therapies.

My son also participates in the Children's Long Term Support program, which helps children with significant needs pay for a variety of therapies that allow him to be supported in the home. All of these programs are funded by Medicaid. Without them, there is a good chance my son would need to be institutionalized.

Over the weekend, I met with Congressman Gallagher, along with other local disability advocates. We are part of a recently formed group called the 8th District Medicaid Advocates, a group with people who have disabilities and their families who are concerned about proposed cuts to Medicaid funding.

Our requests were simple: Can you vote no on this bill and can you agree to meet with us regularly to understand better what Medicaid does for the disability community?

One member of the group shared her story of how Medicaid programs have helped her get treatment for her traumatic brain injury. With the support of Medicaid programs, she has worked her way back into the workforce and is working her way off of Medicaid and other supports. Another member of our group shared her story of how the IRIS long-term-care program helps her with personal supports that allow her to live on her own. She also shared that because of these supports, she was able to recently obtain a job so she can be more financially independent.

We hope that Congressman Gallagher heard how local people with disabilities want the federal government to continue these programs so they can continue to live in and be a part of their community. Without Medicaid, these individuals could easily end up in costly institutions. Not only is this morally wrong for society, it is more expensive. Countless studies have shown that it is far cheaper to support people in the community than in institutions. However, many of the Medicaid services that keep people in their homes and out of institutions are optional and could be reduced or eliminated if the federal contribution to Medicaid is cut.

We hope that we have opened a dialogue with Congressman Gallagher, and he will continue to meet with us so we can work together to find solutions to our health care problems that make both fiscal and moral sense. As users of these programs, we have common-sense ideas on how to keep them going financially and maximize the federal investment's impact on Wisconsin residents.

We also urge others in the community to call Congressman Gallagher and Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Ron Johnson and tell them to push to have these Medicaid funding cuts removed from the AHCA.

John Jahnke of Green Bay is the father of a 9-year-old who has autism and is nonverbal. He also works as an advocate for local youth with disabilities.

Read or Share this story: <http://gbpg.net/2pbkDdn>
