

To the Members of the Health Policy Oversight Committee:

I submit the following comments on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Iowa Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The Iowa Chapter of NASW has over 1,100 current dues-paying members. NASW's mission is to: 1) promote, develop, and protect the practice of social work and social workers; and 2) seek to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and through its advocacy.

Social workers serve Iowa Medicaid recipients and know firsthand the lifesaving, life-sustaining and life-strengthening results our current Medicaid program yields. Medicaid has served as a crucial safety net for struggling Iowans that would have otherwise been denied access to quality health care.

Our Code of Ethics calls on us to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs. Therefore, NASW-Iowa strongly opposes the privatization of essential healthcare services, including Medicaid. Medicaid privatization is inherently designed to shift the priority away from people and toward profit. This is counter to the spirit and purpose of Medicaid, which is to provide health care to families and individuals with low incomes and limited resources. The current proposal to privatize Medicaid seeks to transform this effective, publicly accountable social program into a profit-generating enterprise that threatens to put our most vulnerable at the mercy of the marketplace.

If Medicaid were to be privatized, it would be essential that strict profit restrictions be implemented. Additionally, any changes to our current Medicaid system must ensure that Iowa's most vulnerable people have access to quality essential services, including mental health services. Changes to Medicaid should promote and increase transparency in program implementation, service delivery, and results. In support of transparency and accountability, we urge the State of Iowa to publicly report on the status of the transition plan for Iowans currently relying on Medicaid services, including how many providers have contracted with the new companies, geographic coverage, how many consumers are able to access and utilize the new services, and how many consumers are falling through the cracks. We also call for the establishment of a process to ensure consumer oversight. Active Medicaid beneficiaries are the experts on their experiences and needs, and as such are best positioned to provide insight and guidance on any proposed changes in the delivery of Medicaid services.

Finally, changes to Medicaid must be particularly sensitive to English Language Learners. These hardworking Iowans are often overlooked and brushed aside because fulfilling their needs can be seen as particularly challenging. Social workers are committed to preventing discrimination based on national origin and to promoting cultural competency in services to individuals with limited English proficiency. So, we call for an intentional effort to address the specific needs of English Language Learners in Iowa.

Thank you for considering our comments and suggestions.

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President of the Chapter Board of Directors

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