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Petition Gaining Momentum

"In just three days, more than 540 people have signed a petition launched by the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri and the Missouri Council of the Blind to call on the General Assembly to restore funding for the Supplemental Aid to the Blind Program, the two sponsor organizations announced this morning.

"The petition, which is available through the website www.moblind.org, calls on legislators to reverse the action taken by the Missouri House of Representatives to slash health care coverage for approximately 2,800 needy blind Missourians."

Denny Huff, president of the Missouri Council of the Blind says that the petition is intended to reach out to the residents of Missouri in an attempt to persuade legislators to restore funding for medical services to the blind. We have been very proactive but it’s time to reach out to the public for help on this issue.

The text of the petition is below.

**SAVE HEALTH COVERAGE FOR THE BLIND IN MISSOURI**

The Missouri House of representatives has passed a budget that would eliminate medical coverage for over 2800 blind citizens of Missouri. They have voted to move funding of this medical coverage from HB 2011 which funds social service programs to HB 2003 which funds higher education. This budget now goes to the Senate for consideration. There was no demand for this sacrifice of a vital safety net for

Blind Missourians from our colleges and universities.

We believe that the severity of the impact that the passage of this budget will have on the blind of Missouri has been minimized by the House. Some of the information that was used in persuading House members to pass this transfer of funding simply isn’t valid.

Argument: If the program didn't exist today, who in this chamber would rise to create it?

Response: The issue is not what we would create today but what has existed for nearly 50 years. Blind Missourians who qualify for the blind pension have weighed their options for medical care and have chosen the ones that have made the most economic sense. Many have incomes that are low enough to exclude them from purchasing insurance on the regular market, and still others have pre-existing conditions which will keep them from getting affordable rates if they can find insurance at all. The argument that, under the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies will have to accept all applicants, regardless of their pre-existing conditions, makes no difference today. The relevant portion of the law does not take effect until 2014, and there is no certainty at this point it will be found constitutional or that the congress will not nullify it.

Argument: Since the blind pension is contingent on assets rather than income, Stevie Wonder could receive benefits if he lived in this state.

Response: Given that only ones home and personal jewelry are excluded from asset calculation, this argument is foolish on its face. Just one of Stevie Wonder's limousines would disqualify him from the pension, as would other houses, high-tech recording equipment, and all of the possessions that one who has sold the number of records he has will have accumulated.

Argument: Many people who receive the medical care that goes along with blind pension are employed and have no real need for it.

Response: More than 70% of the blind population is unemployed. A good number of those who are employed work in sheltered workshops which qualify for certificates that will allow them to pay their blind employees less than the federal minimum wage. Recipients of blind pension who are gainfully employed and have medical insurance as a result of their work would only use the benefit after their primary and secondary insurance has paid. The leading causes of adult onset blindness are medical conditions that bring with them additional medical problems: diabetes, glaucoma, lupus, Muscular sclerosis, or in the case of macular degeneration, the medical needs of the elderly.

Before making a drastic change to this program based on the supposition that there is a number of undeserving people, who are recipients, compile the data and understand the effect this change will have on living breathing people. Don't let the data be gathered from what we come to see in emergency rooms and nursing homes as blind people fall through the holes you are tearing in their safety net.

Argument: Blind people get more than others who are disabled.

Response: The word disability is a term that hints at some kind of physical or mental problem, but is so generic that, in terms of devising concrete programs, it is quite ineffective. Think how diverse the needs of people who are classified as disabled are. A young woman is considered disabled if she is severely profoundly mentally delayed and requires the most basic care--feeding, diapering, and 24 hour supervision. The construction worker who hurts his back is disabled if he can no longer work in his profession, but he will still be able to drive, read, make out his checks, and go to the grocery store independently. Certainly it is clear that people who are blind fall somewhere between these extremes. To suggest that the blind person needs as much assistance from the state as one of her severely profoundly mentally impaired citizens is as absurd as to suggest that the person with a back injury requires the same kind of assistance as the blind.

In addition, we want to make it very clear that we are not supporting the bill that would eliminate sales tax exemptions on newspaper equipment to help fund state medical subsidies

For people who are blind. The newspapers across the state have been very supportive of our position on the Medicaid cuts and because they have told it like it is, they are being targeted for the stand they are taking. We don’t want that money! The medical health care for the blind and the tax exemption for newspapers both existed before this budget and they can both exist now.

**We the undersigned citizens of Missouri are asking the legislators of Missouri to restore funding for medical coverage for the blind because we feel it is the right thing to do.**