



*Nothing is politically right  
that is morally wrong.*

**MISSOURI SENATE**  
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion  
is the firmest friend of truth.*

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A New Day for Missouri's Social Service System

Op-Ed Piece - Submitted by: Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood

3-17-05

Word Count: 579

The old saying goes, "if it's not broke, don't fix it." Unfortunately, our Medicaid system is so outdated, broken and beyond repair that we need to fix it.

Medicaid was created 40 years ago by the federal government and matches state dollars to provide healthcare services to our most vulnerable people. Medicaid in Missouri skyrocketed throughout the 1990's. At the time, Missouri leadership saw it as an accomplishment every time we added a new person to Missouri's Medicaid rolls. Quantity was more important than quality, leading us to a Missouri where one out of six of our citizens is a Medicaid recipient. The Medicaid budget increases by \$1 billion dollars every two to three years. The state's revenues cannot keep up with this out-of-control system.

That is why we are committed to moving to a new day in providing the necessary medical services and social services to the most vulnerable people in our state's population.

The Medicaid reform bill the Senate passed is the first step to bringing Missouri's social welfare system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The measure, Senate Bill 539, creates the Medicaid Reform Commission to review our state's system and make recommendations for a new, innovative approach by Jan. 1. From these recommendations we will implement a new system to replace the current Medicaid system beginning July 1, 2006.

As a member the Senate Committee on Pensions, Veterans' Affairs and General Laws, I listened to more than seven hours of testimony on Senate Bill 539 that also creates accountability measures on in-home services as well as places limits on eligibility to some portions of our current Medicaid system. These limits are necessary to pass a balanced budget and provide us the opportunity to shape a new healthcare system for Missourians.

We heard from Melinda Sheppard, a supervisor for the Division of Family Services in St. Louis, who told us that of the nearly 450 cases she randomly reviewed in the Mc+ for Kids program she found 258 families who should not have been in the program. They had access to private insurance or made too much money to qualify. The program covers families earning up to three times the poverty level or \$58,050 for a family of four, plus families are allowed to have up to \$250,000 in assets and still qualify.

We also heard from a woman who was confined to a wheelchair. I appreciate the passion and stamina she showed coming to Jefferson City to testify, but her fears are not warranted. Neither the limits we placed on the current Medicaid system nor a new social services system would prevent care for our state's most vulnerable citizens, including her.

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An electronic version can be found at:

[www.senate.state.mo.us/05info/members/mem15.htm](http://www.senate.state.mo.us/05info/members/mem15.htm) (Current News Releases Link)

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I understand the apprehension of some who are served by our current Medicaid system. Change, especially this dramatic, can be stressful. But without checking the growth of the current program, we will find ourselves limiting Medicaid services year after year. That is not a solution.

Thankfully, we have an opportunity to end this vicious cycle by dedicating to work hard for the next year to create and implement a new and better social services system for the people of Missouri. It must be a system that defines who our most vulnerable citizens are and provides them with the right care at the right place, the right time and right cost. Rest assured we will create a system that is accountable and affordable to taxpayers and, at the same time, protects the people who most need these services.

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