

Kentuckians with disabilities see looming 4% Medicaid cut as 'threat'

BY SARAH LADD
KENTUCKY LANTERN

FRANKFORT — Kentuckians with disabilities and their loved ones and advocates came to Frankfort and pleaded Friday with elected officials to find a way to protect the services they receive through Medicaid waivers.

Several spoke during a legislative subcommittee meeting, which was formed to handle issues surrounding waiver waitlists, and many more spoke at a town hall meeting and rally on the Capitol Annex steps. Organizers estimated hundreds attended these events.

Laura Orsland, the mother of a son with disabilities who founded the HIVE in Bowling Green to support “people with developmental disabilities and those who care for them,” said the looming 4% cuts to the providers who help her family and others, “is not just a number to us. It’s a threat.”

“It is a warning,” she said. “It is the sound of one more piece of stability slipping away.”

A June 8 letter from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services informed various providers they would see a 4% reduction in Medicaid reimbursement starting Aug. 1. Reductions are set to target the following waivers, in addition to providers in other sectors:

Home and Community Based Waiver, which provides services to Kentuckians 65 and older or those who are physically disabled and need a nursing facility level of care.

Michelle P. Waiver, which provides services for Kentuckians with intellectual or developmental disabilities who need



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nursing facility or immediate care facility level of care.

Model II Waiver, which provides services for people needing ventilator support 12 or more hours a day, are on a physician-monitored weaning program and need a nursing facility level of care.

Supports for Community Living, which provides services for Kentuckians with intellectual or developmental disabilities who need immediate care facility level of care.

Meanwhile, families who need waiver services said it’s already difficult to find providers able to care for them and their loved ones.

Leslie Hoffmannthe deputy commissioner of the Department

for Medicaid Services, said there were nearly 19,000 people on waiting lists for Medicaid waivers as of July 13, with only around 1,000 spots available.

The cost of waiver services and Medicaid claims have increased from around \$492,000 per person in 2020 to around \$607,166 in 2025, Hoffmann said in a presentation to members of the Waiver Waitlist Management Subcommittee on Friday morning. Total annual expenditures for these services hit nearly \$1.9 billion in 2025 even as many spend years on wait lists for care.

Dr. Steven Stack, secretary for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, said solutions to the wait list and other issues come back to money.

“If you shed tears over the size of the Medicaid budget now, some of the ways we could make all of these problems go away would make you shed buckets of tears about how much larger the cost would be,” he said.

Grace Anna Rodgers, a singer who has Michelle P. Waiver services and uses a wheelchair, told those gathered for the Friday afternoon town hall: “Don’t ever feel sorry for yourself, because we are still human beings.”

“A lot of people see people like me as somebody who, ‘oh she’s in a wheelchair, she can’t do anything,’ but we thrive and we love to do things,” she said. “I play piano, I sing and I love doing it. I am a person.”

Claire Mynear, who has

autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and other diagnoses, said she waited 15 years to get her Michelle P. Waiver.

“I need the services to help me to be able to do things like to be independent and see friends and do things that I like to do out in the community, and that helps me be able to go out when I have services,” said Mynear, 34. “I like doing a lot of Special Olympic sports and stuff.”

Gov. Andy Beshear has blamed the budget passed by the General Assembly this year for forcing his hand toward the cuts, while lawmakers have said he could better manage the money they provided.

Several families asked that leaders find a way to work together and reverse the cut.

“I’m asking everyone who has a voice in this decision to look beyond the blame and look at the result. Forget the political back and forth for a minute, and look at the human beings standing in the middle of it,” said Orsland, the Bowling Green advocate.

“Look at the disabled adults who depend on these services to live. Look at the parents who are terrified of what happens next. Look at the siblings, the workers, the families, the people whose lives hang in the balance,” she said. “My son is not a line item, and my family is not a talking point. People with disabilities are not statistics. They are multidimensional, sentient human beings that deserve dignity, safety and care. And they deserve better than cuts that make life harder, lonelier and more fragile.”

TEENAGERS

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teens. We don’t have to worry about the little kids and we can have fun as teens and bigger kids,” Boserman said.

“It’s also a great experience for people to get to know more and to spread love and kindness,” Whitehead added. “That’s what this event is supposed to be for. It is to bring everybody around the area together and have no drama and have a great night.”

Whitehead also said that it is a great opportunity to learn more social skills.

“I have a really hard time talking and making friends. This event helps those, like me, who are very anti-social,” Howard said.

Up on the SplashPad, trio Averie Hollenbeck, 12, Layla Williams, 13, and Aurora Hoffmann, 12, were enjoying the warm day by playing in the water.

“We had to do a lot of stuff to convince our parents to let us come,” Hollenbeck said.

“It’s okay because we’re out here having fun,” Williams added. “We’re excited for it.”

The SplashPad is one of their favorite things about Teen Night, according to Hoffmann.

“And seeing our friends,” Hoffmann added.

The girls said that they



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Serenity Corn, 17, goes to kick a ball Friday while at Optimist Park in Vine Grove for the first Teen Night event.



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While attending the first Teen Night event at Optimist Park in Vine Grove, Ashlee Howard, 14, center, Kaylee Boserman, 16, right, and boyfriend Zander Whitehead, 14, left, were laughing as they used the Hold-N-Spin spinner Friday night.



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Teenagers from across of Hardin County were all smiles at the first Teen Night as they played during a foam party Friday night at Optimist Park in Vine Grove.



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Kalie Medley, 13, right, and Avary St. Arnault, 12, dance together Friday while attending the first Teen Night event held at Optimist Park in Vine Grove.

times.

“Maybe their next theme

could be Halloween,” Hollenbeck said. “I’m happy

that we get to do fun things.”

FUN

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small towns, the small cities and the small fairs sometimes give you more of a quality environment or a family environment.”

When not sliding down inflatables, friends Lisa Edwards, 7, and Tina Clark, 8, were enjoying petting the animals at the petting zoo.

“The rabbits kept jumping out of their bucket. It was cool to see it jump out,” Clark said. “It was also cool to see a turkey up close.”

The duo, along with other young kids, could also choose from a variety of food trucks, play on playground equipment and shop at different vendors.

Edwards said she enjoyed playing mini-golf.

“I got a hole-in-one twice on different holes,” Edwards said. “I love it. I hope they bring it back next year.”



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Cohen Lynch, 6, was enjoying his Saturday at Glendale’s first SummerFest by sliding down a bounce house slide at the Glendale Park.



KODEE BRINEGAR/The News-Enterprise

Amelia Marek, 3, pets a rabbit Saturday while at the first SummerFest in Glendale. The rabbit had a habit of jumping out of its container to feed on the grass.