

Looming 4% Medicaid cut is a ‘threat’ to Kentuckians with disabilities

BY SARAH LADD
KENTUCKY LANTERN
KENTUCKY HEALTH NEWS

Kentuckians with disabilities and their loved ones and advocates came to Frankfort Friday, July 17, and pleaded 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



Hundreds of Kentuckians with disabilities and their loved ones and advocates came to Frankfort and pleaded with elected officials to find a way to protect the services they receive through Medicaid waivers on July 17. (Kentucky Lantern photo by Sarah Ladd)

intellectual or developmental disabilities who need 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, who 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 Hoffmann, the deputy commissioner

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

Year over year, 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 waitlists waiting for care.

Dr. Steven Stack, the secretary for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, said solutions to the waitlist 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.

“I am a person” 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 (ADHD), 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 the 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.

“Kentucky has been known for horses and bourbon. Let us channel that same energy and wealth into becoming the nation’s leading state for our most vulnerable people,” she said. “What good are new buildings, parks and highways if the people who need them most cannot access or benefit from them?”

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.”

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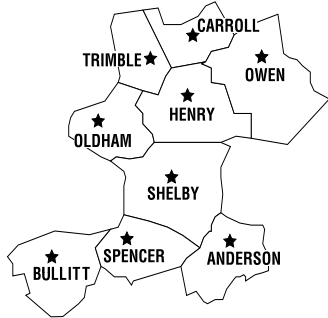
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