

Date: March 24, 2021

To: Chairman Smith and Members of the Budget Committee

From: Angela Brown, CEO, St. Louis Regional Health Commission

RE: In Support of HB 20

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Budget Committee,

My name is Angela Brown, and on behalf of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC), I am writing in strong support of HB 20. The RHC is a non-profit organization representing hospital systems, community health centers, non-profits, business leaders, providers, and patients. **We ask you to approve HB 20 and fully fund Medicaid expansion to improve the health of Missouri families and bring billions of federal dollars to our state.**

The RHC runs Gateway to Better Health (GBH), a temporary health care program for 20,000 uninsured adults annually in St. Louis City and County. Through meticulous data collecting and reporting, **the pilot program has proven that additional coverage improves both access to health care and health outcomes for our region. Now is our chance to amplify these positive results across Missouri by expanding Medicaid.**

Medicaid expansion aligns with the RHC's mission to increase access to health care, improve health outcomes, and reduce health disparities. More than 500,000 individuals in Missouri are uninsured, and this number has only grown since the start of the pandemic. Medicaid expansion will improve access to health care by providing coverage to more than 230,000 Missourians, including people with chronic diseases, such as diabetes and asthma. Medicaid expansion will also improve the health of Missourians, reduce overall mortality, and decrease health disparities among covered populations. The National Bureau of Economic Research shows that the nation would have had 15,600 fewer deaths if all states had expanded Medicaid from the start. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), expansion is also associated with a significant reduction in racial disparities for rates of preterm birth, a strong predictor of infant mortality. As our nation battles structural racism and COVID-19, Medicaid expansion is one clear strategy to create a more equitable system of care and save lives.

COVID-19 has financially strained our state's health care system. Expanding Medicaid will strengthen our public health infrastructure and support community health centers (CHCs) and hospitals. Missourians rely on CHCs for critical services, such as medical, dental, and behavioral health care. Even before the pandemic, these organizations were struggling to stay open with current reimbursement rates. Medicaid expansion will help these health centers continue to provide quality care to our community. Additionally, since 2014, at least 15 hospitals in Missouri have closed, forcing people to drive longer distances to reach a hospital when experiencing a medical emergency. Medicaid expansion will protect critical access to health care across our state, especially in rural areas and urban centers.

Medicaid expansion is not only the *right* thing to do; it is the *smart* thing to do. Expansion will save Missouri money and improve our economy. Expansion will bring billions of our tax dollars back to Missouri and save our state money, according to Washington University. Missouri Budget Project also shows that from expanding Medicaid, Missouri can expect additional savings and revenues that were not included in Governor Parson's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2022. For example, the budget does not include Families First Coronavirus Response Act's temporary 6.2 percentage point FMAP (Federal Medical Assistance Percentage) increase during the public health emergency. In addition to these savings, according to KFF, Missouri will receive an extra \$1.15 billion in federal funding if it expands Medicaid. This money comes from the American Rescue Plan's temporary 5 percentage point increase of the FMAP for non-expansion populations. This additional funding for Missouri's general revenue would more than cover Medicaid expansion and offset costs for other social services. In addition to increasing savings and revenues, expansion has positively affected economies of expanded states, particularly for under-resourced communities. Benefits could include increases in average household incomes, State Gross Domestic Product, and available jobs (especially in the health care setting).

Medicaid expansion will save lives and save dollars. In August 2020, Missourians voted to expand Medicaid. We ask you to listen to the will of Missouri voters and fully fund Medicaid expansion by approving HB 20.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Angela Brown, CEO, St. Louis Regional Health Commission