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LINCOLN—State legislators focused on Medicaid and what expanding it could mean for Nebraskans March 5 at the Health and Human Services Committee meeting.

One of the bills the committee considered was LB261, which would ensure that Medicaid benefits for people with disabilities wouldn't be cut if they earned more income. The bill would update the Medicaid Insurance for Workers with Disabilities Act.

Lynn Redding of Grand Island testified in support of the bill, introduced by Sen. Mike Gloor, also of Grand Island.

Redding, who has a disability, works at McDonald's and said she couldn't take a managerial promotion offered to her because she would lose Medicaid coverage.

She said her medications cost her hundreds of dollars monthly. Not passing the bill, she said, would compromise the well-being of people with disabilities.

"Working is important to me, as it is to many other people with disabilities, but my health is also important," she said. "I want to be self-sufficient, but I cannot jeopardize my Medicaid."

The law would require a person to work at least 40 hours a week. Gloor said the intention of the bill is to protect disabled people who work and encourage further self-sufficiency.

Currently, people with disabilities who start making too much money for Medicaid's income eligibility requirements would have to pay more expensive private insurance premiums for their medical care if they choose to do that.

"It just seems like it'd be far more advantageous to get people to pay premiums to the state of Nebraska to get people the coverage they need and allow them to work as much as they want," proponent Gayle Hahn, a benefits specialist with Easter Seals, said.

No one testified against the bill.

Nebraska legislators also heard testimony about LB338, a measure that would prohibit health care professionals from discriminating against people on medical assistance programs. The bill was also introduced by Gloor.

Kerry Winterer, CEO of the Department of Health and Human Services, was the only person who testified in support of the bill. He said the department is concerned physicians will turn away Medicaid patients as more flow into the system in the coming years.

"All Nebraska citizens should be able to have access to quality health care regardless of payer source," he said.

Dr. Jessica Meeske, a pediatric dentist in Hastings, testified against the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Dental Association, saying the issue is too complex to fix with this bill.

"It's not as simple as getting enough docs to see the patients," she said.

Meeske, a member of the Medicaid Reform Council, said her practices see a lot of Medicaid patients, but are allowed to turn them down as long as the Civil Rights Act isn't being violated.

“I do limit my practice in Medicaid that I see … Sometimes you have to do that in order to get the sickest kids in the door,” she said.

LB231, introduced by Sen. John Nelson of Omaha was also discussed before the Health and Human Services Committee.

The bill would establish a uniform reimbursement rate from the DHHS for adult day services. Currently, the Medicaid waiver rate is $32.97, but the lower block grant rate is $17.34, a rate that is income-based and for which more people qualify. The bill would equalize the grant rate to the higher Medicaid waiver rate.

According to Julie Kaminski, executive director of Leading Age Nebraska, the actual cost of adult day care is about $50 a day. Kaminski also said Nebraska is the fourth lowest reimburser for adult day services.

“I just feel like for Nebraska seniors we can do better than this in our reimbursement rate,” she said.

No one testified against LB231.

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