

TESTIMONY OF JOHN BARKER
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BEFORE THE MICHIGAN HOUSE HEALTH POLICY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. First, let me thank you for this opportunity to address the establishment of a health insurance exchange for Michigan in compliance with the Affordable Care Act.

My name is John Barker and I am the supervisor of the Charter Township of Union in Isabella County. We are the largest and fastest growing township in our region. We now have almost 13,000 people in Union Township and we completely surround the campus of Central Michigan University and the City of Mount Pleasant. I am here today to address an issue that is outside of the scope of our township government, but directly affects many of the people in my community who have limited or no access to affordable health care. And I am speaking not for our township board, but from my own experience.

As township supervisor I have been involved for the past few years in our countywide health planning committee identifying and attempting to address health problems in our county and in our region. What I have learned during this process is that different parts of our state have different problems, priorities and concerns.

In the course of our regional health planning efforts we have also become more familiar with the new federal Affordable Care Act and how that impacts our county and what will be possible over the next few years as the Affordable Care Act is fully implemented.

One of the most critical aspects of the Affordable Care Act will be what happens in 2014 as uninsured and underinsured Michigan citizens will get to take advantage of Michigan's new health care exchange where they will get to examine and compare health care insurance plans to determine what is best for their small business or families.

But Michigan has yet to begin the process of establishing a health care exchange because there are some people who believe the Affordable Care Act that is now the law of our land is going to somehow go away or that it should at very least be delayed.

If we take no action, if we drag our feet to implement the federal mandate to establish our own Michigan exchange the federal government will step in and do it for us. But a cookie cutter solution coming out of Washington is not what Michigan needs and I would argue, is a very bad idea.

I argue that because I know better than many of you that Michigan is not like every other state because I have lived in many other states. And just like there are different health concerns in different parts of Michigan, other states also have other ways of doing things and that is why we need a Michigan Health

exchange, not one born in Washington. And delaying the establishment of a Michigan exchange is not the answer.

Delay will not only be foolish, it will be costly and harmful to the people of Michigan. We have already lost more than \$9 million in planning money that we could have had and could lose another \$65 million or more if we don't begin now on the 12 to 18 month long process of planning a Michigan exchange by and for the people of Michigan.

I know that most of you are aware that there are those who believe the best option is to do nothing. Some say we should wait and see what happens and maybe the federal solution will not be so bad. And maybe even this will all go away and there is no need to change anything.

But if we cannot honestly look into the eyes of more than a million Michigan residents who have no health insurance and tell them that everything is fine, then we need to do something and that time is now.

Michigan needs a Michigan solution that allows small businesses and individuals to get better rates because they will be in a larger pool. A Michigan solution will address our problems and help Michiganders make the best choices by comparing apples to apples in health care plans.

I know that making change is not easy. We've been making a lot of changes in our community. I have been a change agent all my life, both in the public sector and in the private sector and I can assure you that there always will be those people who are opposed to change.

When I worked for the Mayor of Baltimore many years ago he liked to tell the story of an old man who was sitting on a new park bench in the newly refurbished town square of an Eastern Shore community. And when the mayor approached the elderly gentleman and remarked how nice the new town square was and how delightful the changes in the community where, the old man looked up at the mayor with a grumpy face and declared. "Yeah, and I was opposed to all of it."

Well, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I hope your legacy will be that you can proudly say that you helped to provide the leadership for a better Michigan, that you were part of the change that produced a system of better and more equitable health care for Michigan, that you helped establish Michigan's first health care exchange and not be like that old man in the town square.

Thank you for your time.

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