

BREAKING NEWS

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New law expands Medicaid coverage to blind, seniors and disabled

Andrew Sheeley Jun 28, 2016

Governor Jay Nixon signed House Bill 1565 into law earlier this month, expanding Medicaid coverage to blind, disabled and senior citizens previously locked out of the program.

The new law specifically raises the amount of savings claimants who are already on Medicare can have in their bank account to qualify for additional Medicaid coverage. Previous to the new law, recipients were mandated to have less than \$1,000 in savings to qualify for Medicaid coverage through MO Healthnet. The asset limit will now increase by \$1,000 per year for an unmarried person, and \$2,000 per year for a married couple, starting in fiscal year 2018 and go up to a total of \$5,000 and \$10,000, respectively, by the end of fiscal year 2021.

Senior citizen advocates across the state criticized the \$1,000 coverage qualification as unfair and burdensome in forcing recipients to “spend down” their savings to get Medicaid.

Local Silver Haired Legislature Senator Elizabeth Broughton wrote an article published in the March 31, 2015 edition of The Salem News in which she stated, “Many questions need to be asked and answered as to why this burden is placed on the back and bellies of the elderly when they can hardly survive on what they receive from Social Security and their pensions now. And it costs us just as much as others to live and keep warm.”

Legislative researchers in Jefferson City estimate the new rules will add about 10,000 people to Missouri's Medicaid program through fiscal year 2022, at a cost of \$45 million when fully implemented.

State Representative Jeff Pogue (R-Salem) was one of seven who voted to not pass HB 1565 when it was passed in the Missouri House Feb. 25 by a vote 151-7. When reached to comment on the bill being signed into law Pogue emailed The Salem News Sunday writing, "HB 1565 is a form of Medicaid Expansion. I keep my word to the taxpayers by opposing and voting 'No' to Obamacare and all forms of Medicaid Expansion. Medicaid is a broken system with low reimbursement rates for providers, and hardworking taxpayers have to pay the bill with more taxes and higher health insurance premiums. Medicaid Expansion also funnels away tax dollars from our public debt, education system, and transportation infrastructure."

Dan Brown (R-Rolla) was one of 29 Missouri Senators who voted to pass HB 1565 in the Missouri Senate on May 10. It passed by a final vote of 29-1.

"It was the right thing to do, hopefully it will help seniors be more independent and give them more control over their lives," Brown said to The Salem News via telephone Monday. "We tend to be very conservative in the Senate, and this bill will have a small impact on the budget, but I think it will end up saving the state money in the long run. We had some gripping testimony from many seniors who told us how hard it is to live on \$1,000 if you're duly enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid. The whole idea is for them to have more money on hand, so in case the car breaks down they'll have the money to fix it and won't end up in a nursing home. If they end up in a nursing home it'll cost taxpayers much more because they'll pay for most of that bill."