



NEWSRELEASE

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For more information, contact:

M. J. Ellington or Jim Carnes at (334) 832-9060

High court affirms affordable health coverage

Federal incentives for covering uninsured Alabamians offer major economic boost

The U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision upholding the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is a huge victory for all Alabamians, Arise Citizens' Policy Project executive director Kimble Forrister said Thursday. The ruling is especially important for hundreds of thousands of people in our state who want health insurance but can't afford it or have been denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

"In a high-poverty state like Alabama, the Affordable Care Act provides tools to break the chain linking low income to poor health," Forrister said. Nearly 750,000 Alabamians, including 100,000 children, are without health insurance. Alabama ranks high in numerous national measures of chronic health conditions and other health risks.

With today's decision, the high court dismissed challenges from 26 states seeking to overturn key provisions of the law commonly known as Obamacare. Alabama was one of the states that sued.

Objections centered on the law's requirements for most uninsured Americans to buy health insurance or face fines (the individual mandate) and the expansion of Medicaid to cover non-elderly individuals with income up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$30,000 for a family of four).

Medicaid expansion – one of Alabama's chief concerns in the lawsuit – will have significant economic impact for the state, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. With the eligibility changes in 2014, the state would cover 351,567 new enrollees and generate another \$10.3 billion in federal funds for the healthcare industry here during the first five years, Kaiser estimates. To generate the \$10.3 billion, Alabama would need to contribute only \$470 million during the same five-year period.

Forrister said the state's cost to cover uncompensated care should go down during the same period because most people would be insured. "It should have significant savings for the state as well as positive impact for the economy," Forrister said. "It would make little economic sense to turn down the expansion."

With the court's decision, Alabama can now proceed with plans to implement a key requirement of the law, an Alabama Health Insurance Marketplace scheduled for operation in January 2014. Forrister said ACPP will redouble its push to educate the public about the ACA and advocate for a strong consumer voice in decisions as plans for implementation go forward.

Among the ACA benefits that can now continue or move forward are the option for young adults to stay on their parents' plans until they turn 26; an end to denial of children's coverage because of pre-existing conditions; an end to insurance company discrimination on the basis of age, gender or health status; and a choice of affordable insurance plans that meet quality standards.

"As people learn more about what the law guarantees, they will experience the peace of mind that comes with health security," Forrister said. "All of us stand to gain from the promise of health coverage for everyone."

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Arise Citizens' Policy Project is a nonprofit statewide coalition 150 congregations and organizations dedicated to improving the lives of low-income Alabamians.