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 on June 20, 2014 at 4:00 PM, updated June 20, 2014 at 4:01 PM

By Jennifer Clarke and Laura R. Smith

Gov. Tom Corbett has a rare opportunity to score a win-win for Pennsylvania. A bill introduced by Rep. Gene DiGirolamo, R-Bucks, would simultaneously help close the state's budget gap and make health insurance available to more than 500,000 Pennsylvanians.



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Approved last week by the House Human Services Committee, the bill would temporarily expand Medicaid—and would be paid for entirely by the federal government.

Twice in the last few weeks, Gov. Corbett has recognized when sensible policy and the will of Pennsylvanians intersect, and has subsequently made responsible decisions—even when those decisions cut against perceived party lines or his personal views.

Last month, the governor declined to appeal a judge's ruling prohibiting enforcement of Pennsylvania's controversial voter ID law, which would have disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians.

Two weeks later, he opted not to challenge a federal judge's ruling for marriage equality. While the decision went against the Governor's personal beliefs, the majority of Pennsylvanians support same-sex marriage, and he recognized that the chances of winning on appeal were slim.

This ability to recognize changing realities, emerging opportunities, and the will of the citizenry is a valuable trait for the leader of any state—a trait Gov. Corbett has the chance to exhibit for a third time this Spring.

Implementing Medicaid expansion now would help solve this serious budget shortfall.

The Affordable Care Act gives states the option to use federal funds to extend Medicaid coverage to certain uninsured people many of whom are low-wage workers whose employers do not offer insurance, who cannot afford to purchase private insurance, and who do not qualify for existing state Medicaid. Every state bordering Pennsylvania has accepted these funds.

Last year, the Republican-led state Senate passed a bill that would have expanded Medicaid in Pennsylvania, but House Republicans later stripped Medicaid expansion from the bill.

In February of this year, Gov. Corbett asked the federal government to approve the "Healthy Pennsylvania" plan, which would expand Medicaid eligibility but roll back many benefits for new and existing enrollees.

We joined a wide range of advocates in calling on the federal government to reject the plan unless it is amended to restore these benefits. Even if the plan is approved in some form, it would not take effect until January 2015 or later.

While the federal government continues its lengthy review of Healthy Pennsylvania, Rep. DiGirolamo's bill would provide much-needed health insurance and care, at least temporarily, to hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians.

This bill would not only make Pennsylvania healthier—it would also help balance the state's budget. Because of Governor Corbett's decision not to expand Medicaid, Pennsylvania is missing out on an estimated \$5 to \$10 million in federal funds with each passing day.

But if this bill becomes law, the federal government will pay 100% of coverage costs for newly eligible Medicaid enrollees until the end of 2016, when the bridge coverage is set to expire.

In fact, the bill explicitly protects the state against financial risk; the state could end the expanded coverage if, at any time, the federal government fails to pay 100% of the costs.

Expanding Medicaid now would generate immediate economic benefits for Pennsylvania. So far this year, General Fund tax revenue collections are far lower than budgeted.

According to the nonpartisan Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, the state's General Fund revenue deficit had reached \$613 million as of June 4, still a few weeks shy of the fiscal year's end.

Implementing Medicaid expansion now would help solve this serious budget shortfall.

In May 2013, Pennsylvania's Independent Fiscal Office found that Medicaid expansion would add \$620 million to the state's 2014-15 budget through savings (on Medical Assistance costs) and new tax revenue (from hundreds of millions of federal dollars flowing into Pennsylvania).

In addition, the RAND Corporation found last year that Medicaid expansion would create about 35,000 new jobs in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvanians recognize these benefits; an April 2014 poll conducted by Public Policy Polling found that 59% of Pennsylvania voters supported expanding Medicaid.

Rep. DiGirolamo's bill is a sensible solution with bipartisan support, enormous health and fiscal benefits, and no financial risk.

It is good policy, fiscally responsible, and—if Gov. Corbett and the House leadership act now—would make Pennsylvania a more fair and healthy place to call home.

Jennifer Clarke is the executive director of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. Prior to joining the Law Center, Ms. Clarke was a partner at Dechert LLP. Laura R. Smith is a rising 2L at Berkeley Law.

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