



Rally to stop Medicaid cuts held at capitol

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AUSTIN - With the Texas House set to start floor debate Friday on the budget bill, Texans opposing deep cuts in health care for the poor and children demonstrated at the capitol Wednesday.

They are afraid that thousands of low income Texans will lose health coverage if lawmakers do not spend more of the Rainy Day Fund or come up with new revenue.

The House budget would cut Medicaid \$6 billion from current services to save money.

Those opposed to those cuts wanted to be heard.

"The children in the state of Texas are the ones who are going to be adversely affected from one end of Texas to the other," said Rep. Sylvester Turner, Houston.

It is estimated that about 2.2 million children are on Medicaid in Texas.

Teri Little is from Houston and her seven year old granddaughter is one of them. Little said her granddaughter suffers from a rare neurological disorder.

"If our legislature decides to make these cuts we will not have any other health care options open for us or for her," said Little.

Under the House budget bill, the reimbursement rate to doctors would be cut 10 percent.

Kaufman pediatrician Dr. Turner Lewis fears more doctors would just drop Medicaid patients who are predominantly children and disabled and elderly adults.

"If you have reimbursement cuts on the Medicaid side it will affect your bottom line, there's no doubt about that," said Dr. Lewis.

In the House budget bill, Dallas County would lose \$1.2 billion in Medicaid, according to an analysis by the Center for Public Policy Priorities that advocates for low income Texans and the programs that benefit them.

Tarrant County would lose \$718 million, Denton County \$193 million and Collin County \$121 million.

Arlene Wohlgemuth, Executive Director of the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, supports the cuts. She thinks Medicaid costs will grow unsustainably leading to huge tax increases,

"The problem is the Medicaid program has failed," said Wohlgemuth. "It does not deliver the care, it's at an increasingly high cost."

She said the federal government should at least give Texas flexibility to try and reduce costs.

The issue now is how much will the program be cut. Medicaid patients will have to wait until the vote to learn what will happen with health care.

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