

“Empowered Care: Creating a Better Medicaid”

Medicaid in its present day form is the “Pac-Man” of Florida’s budget, vehemently chomping its way through more state revenue year after year. Since its inception in 1970, the Medicaid Program has grown at a tumultuous pace. Factors such as increasing program complexity, fraud, rising health care costs, and explosive population growth have created a current system that is costly, inefficient and in need of modernization.

Today, Medicaid represents approximately 24 percent of the entire state budget with expenditures exceeding \$14 billion dollars. If these current trends continue, Medicaid is expected to represent 59 percent (over \$50 billion dollars) of the total state budget by the year 2015. With this kind of unsustainable growth in enrollment and expenditures a change was inevitable.

During the 2005 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature moved towards overhauling the Medicaid Program to make it more accountable, organized, need focused and most importantly, sustainable to future growth. Under the new reforms, the state’s role will change so that it is largely a purchaser of care, and oversight will focus on improving access and increasing quality of care.

On October 19, 2005, the State’s formal Medicaid waiver application received federal approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Governor Bush has now called upon the Florida Legislature to convene in a Special Session on December 5th to finalize the implementation of the Medicaid reforms.

The 2.2 million Medicaid recipients in Florida will no longer have to navigate and manage their way through a complex and cumbersome system. Once the final details have been arranged and approved by the Legislature during Special Session, the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) will implement the new patient-centered system revolving around a “Medicaid marketplace” in Duval and Broward counties. Over time, Medicaid reform will gradually phase in enabling all of Florida’s beneficiaries to take advantage of their newfound “empowered care.”

Skepticism and fear are certainly to be expected with reforms that touch the lives of so many. Over history, society initially feared electricity, gas-powered engines, fire, even the celestial night sky. But fear is the enemy of progression and the current state of Medicaid cannot remain dormant as a result of apprehension. Through this bold initiative, the program will thrive with vitality and sustainability for the next generations of Floridians.

For more information regarding Special Session or Medicaid reform, please feel free to visit www.kenpruitt.com or contact my office at 772-344-1140.