



Congress is expected to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the coming months. An important piece of the law that is often overlooked in larger discussions is the provision that provides Medicaid coverage for former foster youth until the age of 26.

Lawmakers are currently working on drafting legislation to replace the ACA and need to hear how important it is to keep former foster youth covered. We must act quickly to influence their decision to act quickly on this bill.

The State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center (SPARC) encourages state partners to help build public support for continuing Medicaid coverage for former foster youth in their home state by submitting op-eds to their local and regional newspapers, in addition to publishing the op-ed on their website as a blog or newsletter entry, sometime in February and March 2017.

The SPARC Team has provided a sample op-ed below that can be adapted and used by your organization in your local media market. It's always best to call your newspaper's editorial department to inquire about its op-ed submission guidelines, deadlines, and other relevant submission information.

By **[First Name Last Name]**
[Title, Your Organization]

For decades, child welfare reform has had strong bipartisan support, even during times when heated partisanship has divided Congress on national matters.

Congress currently has an opportunity to ensure that former foster youth continue to have Medicaid coverage until they turn 26. Under current law, youth who age out of foster care, and were enrolled in prior to aging out, are eligible for Medicaid coverage until the age of 26. This provision was drafted as an equitable response to children being allowed to stay on their parent's insurance policy until age 26 under the Affordable Care Act. Over 20,000 youth age out of state care nationwide each year. Foster youth do not have the benefit to stay on their parent's health insurance, as they are removed from their own homes and placed in the custody of the state.

As a child advocacy organization, **[name of your organization]**, strongly supports the continuation of this coverage. In **[your state]**, **[number of youth who age out each year]** age out of care each year and have few supports to help them transition into adulthood. Research indicates that 35-60 percent of former foster youth have a chronic or acute health condition that needs treatment such as asthma, cognitive abnormalities, visual and auditory problems, dental decay, and malnutrition. Also 57 percent of youth in care also meet the criteria for a mental health disorder and may need treatment.

There are a number of healthcare issues that divide the country but covering former foster youth should not be one of them. The state has an obligation to care for these youth and by investing in their well-being, saves money in the long run. Youth who can manage their condition and get preventative treatment to reduce medical emergencies are more likely to thrive as adults and reduce the burden of care on the state.

[Insert a youth story from state or comments a member has made in support of foster youth]

[Your Representatives/Semators] should commit to protecting health coverage for former foster youth because this population cannot afford to lose coverage.

Tagline about who you are and your organization.