

Good morning,

My name is Michelle Crow, Southern Arizona Director of Children's Action Alliance. Statewide advocacy organization that works to improve children's health, education and security in Arizona.

Want to applaud the Pima County Board of Supervisors for taking the initiative to address two very important issues today that impact Arizona families and children – the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and the Opioid Epidemic, both of which particularly jeopardize the welfare of children, youth and families across our country; and are inextricably intertwined.

Without a doubt, kids will bear the brunt of health care reforms being discussed in Washington. Quite simply stated, the repeal of ACA means 279,000 Arizona children lose health insurance.

One of the most dramatic impacts of the proposed AHCA are cuts to states' Medicaid programs. For Arizona, this means we start rationing health coverage among the 2 million low-income children, seniors and people with disabilities who rely on this coverage.

It is important to note that close to half of Medicaid population are children, and the proposed reforms especially hit the rural populations hardest. For urban areas 1 in 3 children are covered through Medicaid but for rural populations 1 in 2 or 54% children are covered through Medicaid.

While we are all painfully aware that proposed AHCA effectively ends the Medicaid expansion, and strips away health care coverage for over 400,000 Arizonans, including an estimated 73,000 children, what has been less reported is that KidsCare, the health care program for children in low income working families is also at grave risk, especially in states' such as Arizona where any reduction in federal match means an automatic freeze and possible termination to the program.

Both Medicaid and KidsCare has been huge success stories, bringing uninsured rates among children to lowest levels ever in the U.S. While Congress could choose to give the bipartisan, strongly supported MACRA a clean reauthorization vote, reauthorize the program, and prevent families

from losing coverage, it appears its reauthorization is being delayed and grotesquely used by Members of Congress as a bargaining chip in buying votes to get the ill-conceived AHCA past the finish line.

It is true, repealing the Affordable Care Act is *mean*. Particularly because it means denying affordable coverage to those who are the *most* vulnerable among us, including:

- young adults who grow up and “age-out” of foster care. Not only does the ACA allow youth to stay on their parent’s health plan until age 26 but has special provisions for foster youth so they too can stay covered until age 26 as they make the difficult transition to adulthood.
- children in working families who either don’t have access to or can’t afford dependent coverage through their employers, like families covered by KidsCare and the Marketplace.
- families with children with special health care needs, whose healthcare costs are already staggering and often bury them in medical debt.
- parents and children with pre-existing conditions who are absolutely terrified right now because they will effectively be priced out of the private market by these proposed changes.
- and families who need mental health and substance abuse treatment to keep children out of foster care system.

Governor Ducey has already voiced his concerns and warned that ACA repeal harms Arizona’s economy, threatens health care jobs, burdens the state budget, and endangers health care coverage for Arizonans.

Since your second resolution focuses on the Opioid epidemic ravaging our country, we want to point out that any recent gains we have made in alleviating Arizona’s foster care crisis could be undone by this one single vote in Congress.

The Governor and the Department of Child Safety have been working to turn around the skyrocketing growth in foster care and we're just beginning to see signs of turning the corner. DCS now reports fewer children are entering the foster care system than exiting for the last eight out of ten months. This reverses a seven-year trend of year-over-year growth. If Arizona loses the behavioral health and substance abuse services that families need, we'll go backwards again -- more and more children will need foster care for longer and longer times.

With more than 17,000 children currently in foster care in Arizona and still with one of the highest removal rates in the entire country, Arizona simply can't afford what will occur if Congress votes to allow states to waive essential health care benefits in health plans. Dropping Essential Health Benefits means mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment are always the first to go from plans.

Without these key health care services, untreated mental illness of a parent can become a life-threatening situation of child neglect. Drug addiction can interfere with healthy parenting. And a sudden crisis can disrupt a family forever.

It is critical that Arizona senators and all of Congress to guarantee this type of coverage will continue in any new health plans they craft before they vote to repeal the ACA.

Finally, as someone who buys their health insurance on the Marketplace, for me and my kids, I just want to say that the plans being discussed in Washington right now do not make a single person healthier, nor do they make health care more accessible, nor do they make it more affordable -- it just decides who can have it and who can't.

Arizona voters expect our leaders to do better.