

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BEFORE THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH ON THE GEORGIA PATHWAYS TO COVERAGE 1115 DEMONSTRATION WAIVER EXTENSION

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Rachel Shanklin, Georgia Director and National Women's Entrepreneurship Director
Small Business Majority

Dear members of the Department of Community Health:

My name is Rachel Shanklin and I'm the Georgia Director for Small Business Majority, a small business organization with a mission to empower America's entrepreneurs to build a thriving and equitable economy. I'm pleased to share comments on the Georgia Pathways to Coverage 1115 Demonstration Waiver Extension.

Access to affordable healthcare coverage is a top priority for Georgia's entrepreneurs, especially since it's their highest business expense outside of payroll. The high cost of care is particularly problematic for new businesses and solo entrepreneurs, as offering health insurance often stands in the way of those businesses becoming an employer firm, thus creating major barriers to business expansion. Similarly, the cost of healthcare can impede small employers from attracting and retaining top talent. Small employers want to offer essential benefits like healthcare but often struggle to do so independently. This puts them at a disadvantage when competing with larger, well-established businesses for top talent.

Therefore, it's crucial that Georgia expands access to health coverage to benefit the small business community. Unfortunately, the Georgia Pathways program as it stands is **failing** to lower costs and the uninsured rate. It has enrolled only **6,500** participants in a year and a half, which is just 3% of those who would benefit from full Medicaid expansion. Pathways has struggled to meet its goals of meaningfully increasing access to care for low-income Georgians, as an estimated **359,000** Georgians are still uninsured.

This waiver extension request, while a step in the right direction, still fails to meet the needs of Georgia's small business community. Even if the proposed changes are adopted, it would leave thousands of Georgians uninsured and without an option for health coverage. This includes people with chronic or serious health conditions who are unable to work, parents of children aged 6-19, including those with disabilities, caregivers of the elderly, and caregivers of children or adults with disabilities. Naturally, those groups include small business owners and their employees that need access to healthcare.

The Pathways program would be more effective if eligibility was expanded to include all low-income adults rather than a smaller portion of the uninsured population. Expanded Pathways eligibility in Georgia would create a healthier workforce, stimulate local economies, and alleviate some financial pressures for small businesses, contributing to a more robust and dynamic small business community.

Sincerely,

Rachel Shanklin
Georgia Director | National Women's Entrepreneurship Director
Small Business Majority