



TENNESSEE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee

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Fall 2014

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Presidents' Message

We are in the midst of the national and state mid-term elections, and our local Leagues have been amazingly busy putting on forums, registering voters, and educating their communities on a wide variety of issues. Way to go!

At this writing, voters are going to the polls during early voting to approve or disapprove four amendments to the Tennessee Constitution and elect candidates to various state and federal offices. A huge shout out to the LWVTN **Action Committee** for their stellar work in getting the educational information on our website and out to the local Leagues and the public in a very timely manner (see “Where the League Stands” and “Notes from the LWVTN Action Committee”). We have had numerous requests to print and distribute those materials, which we happily granted. And information was posted on the Tennessee www.Vote411.org site well before early voting began.

Tennessee local Leagues and members also should continue encouraging their elected representatives, both local and state, to support Common Core Standards and Medicaid expansion. Common Core is part of Tennessee’s important effort to set high educational standards that increase student achievement and opportunity. Governor **Bill Haslam** has launched review panels, including principals, instructional coaches, teachers, and college leaders such as expert **Candace McQueen**, dean of education at Lipscomb University, to make sure Tennessee standards are the best in the nation.

Medicaid expansion is so important to at least 230,000 Tennesseans who fall into the income gap and have no access to health insurance either through their employment or the ACA exchange and thus continue to go without health care. It also impacts all Tennesseans through the loss of \$2.7 million each day (the federal government’s 100 percent contribution to Tennessee Medicaid cost for new enrollees) and increasing pressure on local and statewide health care and general economies (see reprints here of articles by **Rashonda Lewis** that have appeared in recent issues of the *LWVN Voter*).

When Co-president **Jo Singer** was in Dallas in June for the National LWV Convention, lots of people from other states asked about our statewide activities. Don’t think that what you do happens in a vacuum—your efforts are noticed in more than your local area.

And by the way, Convention was fantastic; a time to get re-energized in order to accomplish another year of League work. We were happy to have Tennessee representatives from Knoxville, Memphis, Murfreesboro, Nashville, and Oak Ridge in attendance.



Left to right: Leslie Collum, Murfreesboro; Kim Lauth and Judy Poulson, Knoxville; and Mary Ann Reeves, Oak Ridge



Left to right: Jo Singer, Nashville; Judy Davis, Memphis; and Debby Gould, Nashville



Left to right: Judy Poulson and Kim Lauth, Knoxville; Mary Ann Reeves and Pat Bryan (waving), Oak Ridge

The theme of the 51st LWVUS Convention was “**Power: Our Voices, Our Votes.**” Everyone was pumped up and felt throughout and as we departed that we could be a force for change. The power of our united voices was palpable among the 643 voting delegates. We agreed to a study of the process of amending the U.S. Constitution, to review and update the League position on campaign finance, and to weigh in on the redistricting process for the U.S. Congress. We want our nationwide activity to be geared toward making voting rights a permanent part of the Constitution and bringing an end to continual legislative skirmishes that chip away at voters’ rights.

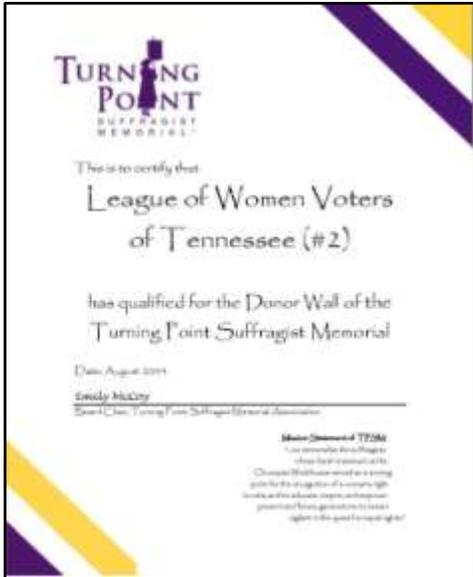
Convention attendees adopted a concurrence with the LWV of New Jersey position opposing all forms of domestic violence and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex and labor trafficking. This is a position we can now act upon on a national, state, or local level. In addition, there were caucuses on strategies in voter protection battles, living wage and economic equality, restoring voting rights to ex-felons, benefits of using VOTE411, and putting a price on carbon emissions. There were workshops and training sessions geared toward making us better informed League members and advocates.

As progressive grassroots organizations, all Leagues have similar interests and problems and it is a wonderful experience to meet and compare notes with folks from around the country. Recognizing this, reelected LWVUS President **Elisabeth MacNamara** challenged League delegates in her acceptance speech: “Our communities are stronger because the Leagues are there. Let’s not be afraid to keep getting in the way and make a difference on

big money and campaign finance reform, redistricting, climate change and voters' rights.”

At the August LWVTN Board meeting, we voted to support our coalition partners in Amendments 1 and 3 by donating \$1000 to each of their advocacy funds: respectively, **Vote No on 1** and **Citizens for Fiscal Sanity**. These groups share our positions on these issues and made worthwhile use of the funds promoting those views.

The Board also voted to continue support for **Tennessee Health Care Campaign** as a \$250 sponsor of its annual conference. We have been in coalition with these folks for many years, congratulate them on their fine work around Tennessee during the first ACA enrollment period, and continue to strive together to ensure available healthcare for all Tennesseans. Our LWVTN position dates back to the LWVUS position taken after a study in the early 1990s, and has been enlarged upon in subsequent years. In addition, the Board contributed \$500 to the **ACA Coalition Rural Ambassador Project**, which is bringing educational programs and support for grassroots advocacy about Medicaid expansion to folks outside Tennessee's cities.



The Board donated \$1000 from the Education Fund to the national **Suffragist Memorial** in Washington, D.C. Our name will be on the memorial wall—as it should be. After all, Tennessee is the state that cast the deciding vote for the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing women's right to vote! The memorial will not be ready for a while, but visitors in the future will be able to share in the struggle and chart its significant outcome.

Continuing our role as advocates, the Board voted additional Education Fund dollars to sponsor public radio ads for **Vote411** during drive time, two weeks prior to the November election in four major markets: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville. Targeting this audience to share our digital Voter's Guide as an important resource for information about candidates and Tennessee's four constitutional amendments was based on trials by the Nashville League before the May 6 local primary and LWVTN statewide ads before the August 7 primary election cycle, which proved a good way to reach voters as well. That

time around, listeners were invited to the LWVTN website to access the League's educational materials about Tennessee courts, judges, and appellate judicial retention selection. Beginning August 4, visits to our website spiked at more than double usual numbers and have continued at a higher rate.

You can see, LWVTN is putting League dollars to work for League values!

In closing, we are excited to see so many folks in Chattanooga coming together as “Members-at-Large” and helping to educate their community about issues. Many thanks to all those involved in leading that group, and especially **Joan Hamner**. LWVTN looks forward to Chattanooga becoming a formal MAL unit and then re-instating the Chattanooga League soon.

We also anticipate Spring Convention in Murfreesboro during April 2015. We hope many of you will set aside time to attend. We will be electing a new Board, setting the LWVTN budget, and reinforcing our commitment to the League.

In League, Co-presidents **Margie Parsley** and **Jo Singer**

SAVE the DATE for LWVTN Spring Convention
April 25-26, 2015
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Where the League Stands—November 4, 2014 Midterms

While the LWV does not take positions on political parties or candidates for office, **the League does take positions on issues**. The League at every level—national, state, and local—has ongoing positions about the first three ballot initiatives to amend the Tennessee Constitution during this election cycle. Three amendments that Tennessee voters will see on November 4 are especially important, complex, and will have enduring impact. We urge members and their family and friends to share League positions widely with others. Remind them that in order for any constitutional amendment to be approved, two things must happen:

- 1) **The amendment must get more “yes” votes than “no” votes; and**
- 2) **The number of “yes” votes must be a majority of the total number of votes cast in the gubernatorial election.**

Also remind them that when considering Amendment 2, it is **NOT TRUE** that if the amendment fails Tennessee will return to the “Tennessee Plan” for selecting appellate judges. That previous merit-based process of judicial selection and evaluation of appellate judges and justices was not renewed by the Legislature during its 108th General Assembly, with final sunset effective June 30, 2013. Current judicial selection is occurring under Governor **Bill Haslam**’s Executive Order of October 17, 2013; that order will expire November 5, 2014.

Complete LWVTN positions and thorough background information about all the amendments are available with the click of your mouse at <http://www.lwvtn.org/>.

The LWVTN Action Committee introduction follows:

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The following materials have been developed by the LWVTN Action Committee. They have been designed to aid League members and Tennessee voters in preparation for the November 4, 2014 state and federal general election. The ballot will include four Tennessee Constitutional Amendments. Please use this package of documents to become a more informed voter and share them widely with your family, friends, neighbors, and communities.

1. Vote NO on Amendment #1 to the Tennessee Constitution “Shall Article 1, of the Tennessee Constitution be amended by adding the following language as a new appropriately designated section: Nothing in this Constitution secures or protects a right to abortion or requires the funding of an abortion. The people retain the right through their elected state representatives and state senators to enact, amend, or repeal statutes regarding abortion, including, but not limited to, circumstances of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest or when necessary to save the life of the mother.”

- [The LWVTN Position on Amendment 1](#)
- [Background information on Amendment 1](#)

2. Vote YES on Amendment #2 to the Tennessee Constitution “Shall Article VI, Section 3 of the Constitution of Tennessee be amended by deleting the first and second sentences and by substituting instead the following:

“Judges of the Supreme Court or any intermediate appellate court shall be appointed for a full term or to fill a vacancy by and at the discretion of the governor; shall be confirmed by the Legislature; and thereafter, shall be elected in a retention election by the qualified voters of the state. Confirmation by default occurs if the Legislature fails to reject an appointee within sixty calendar days of either the date of appointment, if made during the annual legislative session, or the convening date of the next annual legislative session, if made out of session. The Legislature is authorized to prescribe such provisions as may be necessary to carry out Sections two and three of this article.”

- [The LWVTN Position on Amendment 2](#)
- [Background information on Amendment 2](#)

3. Vote NO on Amendment #3 to the Tennessee Constitution “Shall Article II, Section 28 of the Constitution of Tennessee be amended by adding the following sentence at the end of the final substantive paragraph within the section:

“Notwithstanding the authority to tax privileges or any other authority set forth in this Constitution, the Legislature shall not levy, authorize or otherwise permit any state or local tax upon payroll or earned personal income or any state or local tax measured by payroll or earned personal income; however, nothing contained herein shall be construed as prohibiting any

tax in effect on January 1, 2011, or adjustment of the rate of such tax.””

- [The LWVTN Position on Amendment 3](#)
- [Background information on Amendment 3](#)

4. Amendment #4 to the Tennessee Constitution The League of Women Voters of Tennessee does not have a position on this amendment. “Shall Article XI, Section 5 of the Constitution of Tennessee be amended by deleting the following language:

“All other forms of lottery not authorized herein are expressly prohibited unless authorized by a two-thirds vote of all members elected to each house of the general assembly for an annual event operated for the benefit of a 501(c)(3) organization located in this state, as defined by the 2000 United States Tax Code or as may be amended from time to time.

“and by substituting instead the *following language*:

“All other forms of lottery not authorized herein are expressly prohibited unless authorized by a two-thirds vote of all members elected to each house of the general assembly for an annual event operated for the benefit of a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(19) organization, as defined by the 2000 United States Tax Code, located in this state.”

- [The LWVTN Information on Amendment 4](#)

Notes from the LWVTN Action Committee

by LWVTN Action Director Barbara Gay

The LWVTN Action Committee worked hard to inform voters about the Judicial Retention Election on the August ballot by providing information about the selection process, its history, and the Judicial Evaluation Committee assessment of the judges on the LWVTN website. This gave voters a resource to understand “Tennessee Retention Elections Explained in Under 7 minutes!” as well as access to the results of surveys, interviews, and recommendations made by the Evaluation Committee.

The LWVTN Action Committee and local Leagues across the state have been busy working to inform voters about the four Constitutional Amendments that will appear on the November Ballot. Special thanks to **Sue Bredensteiner**, **Debby Gould**, **Diana Page**, and **Karen Weeks** for their research and writing skills. Information about the four amendments appears above, on the LWVTN website, and at www.Vote411.org. We also appreciate the efforts of **Jo Singer**, **Margie Parsley**, **Judy Polson**, **Judy Raines**, and **Alan Karp** in the preparation and posting of this information.

The Chattanooga, Hendersonville, Knoxville, Memphis, Nashville, and Oak Ridge Leagues have held public forums about the Constitutional Amendments. And **Debby Gould** has arranged for public radio advertisements across the state directing voters to the League’s **Vote411** digital voter guide for information about the amendments and candidates. These ads will air for two week before the November 4 Election Day.

The next meeting of the LWVTN Action Committee is on Monday, November 10 at 11:30 am Central Time. We will continue to review the League’s “Priority Issues” in preparation for the next Legislative session in January 2015. All members are welcome to join the Action Committee work. Please contact **Barbara Gay** (barbara.g.gay@gmail.com or 615-297-4145) if interested.

Germaine to our Action work, **Debby Gould** wrote in the October *LWVN Voter*: “As a reminder of what happens when legislation has a detrimental impact in our state we only need to look back two years. In 2012, the League was dismayed when the state legislature passed voter ID laws. The contention of proponents was that the laws would safeguard elections. The League and our partners contended that voter impersonation was virtually nonexistent and, further, the new photo ID requirements would unfairly disenfranchise voters in Tennessee. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is the investigative arm of Congress, released a 206-page report in late September that bears out our concerns through an analysis of turnout statistics from six states, including Tennessee at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665966.pdf>. Articles in the *Washington Post* [HERE](#) and the *New York Times* [HERE](#) recount the analysis of voting patterns. According to the Post, a potential additional

88,000 Tennesseans would have voted in 2012 if the new laws had not been in place! Interestingly, voters in the age cluster from 24 to 33, African-Americans, and newly registered voters were the groups that were more likely to see bigger drops in turnout. LWVN will continue to advocate for the voter ID law's repeal while working in collaboration with other organizations to mitigate its impact.

“Indeed, Nashvillians—including voter rights advocates **Hedy Weinberg**, ACLU; **Patricia Stokes**, Urban League of Middle Tennessee; **Jim Cooper**, 5th District U.S. Congressman; **John Teague**, Planned Parenthood; Rev. **Judy Cummings**, Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship; **Matt Mullen**, Tennessee Citizen Action; **Nick Alexiou**, American Constitution Society; **Debby Gould**, League of Women Voters; **Doug Johnston**, Barrett, Johnston, Martin & Garrison—gathered on October 15. The message, covered heavily by the media, was simple and direct: “Tennessee’s voter ID law is an affront to one of ‘our most fundamental rights,’ and impugned the motives of those who supported the law, in light of a new report showing its effects on turnout.

“It is useful to reflect that now, as in the past, major cultural change does not happen overnight, but rather with consistent and persistent effort of those who care deeply.”



Reprinted from **THE NASHVILLE VOTER**

The League of Women Voters of Nashville
PO Box 158369, Nashville TN 37215 | 615-297-7134
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Ongoing Implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (June 2014)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

ACA Enrollment

Affordable Care Act (ACA) open enrollment wrapped up on March 31 and will start again on November 15 of this year. According to the enrollment report ending March 31, over **151,352** Tennesseans enrolled in marketplace plans and over **83,000** were deemed or assessed eligible for Medicaid. People who missed the March 31 deadline may qualify for a special enrollment period. The marketplace website, www.Healthcare.gov, has more information about who qualifies for a special enrollment period.

Medicaid Expansion

Medicaid expansion is now firmly in the hands of the Tennessee General Assembly. In April, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 2131/House Bill 2248, which requires the Governor to seek and achieve legislative approval of any plan to expand Medicaid. This bill, later signed into law by the Governor Haslam, locked in place legislative oversight for (a) whether an expansion actually happens, and (b) what that expansion looks like. Since the ball lies squarely in the Legislature's court now, we urge League members to reach out to your legislators and make the economic, public health, or personal case for Medicaid expansion in Tennessee. Governor **Bill Haslam** recently stated that he still considers future Medicaid expansion realistic, but a hard sell. Perhaps that sell will be easier after mid-term elections.



The Affordable Care Act, TennCare, and Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (July 2014)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Medicaid Expansion Talks Resume . . . Sort Of

Governor **Bill Haslam** met for the first time, with newly appointed U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary **Sylvia Mathews Burwell** during the National Governors' Association Summer Meeting held in Nashville this week. During their meeting, they discussed the Governor's effort to gain federal approval for a “Tennessee Plan,”—his Medicaid expansion plan—that would leverage federal funding

to purchase health insurance for 160,000 low-income Tennesseans. Secretary Burwell pointed out, as former Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** had previously, that parts of the Tennessee Plan are simply not allowable under current federal law but other parts might be possible. Although the details of the Tennessee Plan have not been made public, parts that seem to be giving HHS pause are details about what services will be covered, how to incentivize healthy behavior, and patient co-payments.

Tennessee Called On the Carpet

Tennessee is one of six states to be called out recently by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Director **Cindy Mann** for not meeting one or more Medicaid/CHIP eligibility and enrollment obligations. In a letter dated June 27, Mann cited the state for failing to meet six out of seven “critical success factors” and gave Tennessee ten days to submit a corrective action plan. That plan is due July 14. CMS appeared most concerned about TEDS (Tennessee Eligibility Determination System), a \$35 million computer system that is intended to streamline Medicaid eligibility determinations and enrollment. TEDS was supposed to be finished last fall, in time for the first open enrollment period under the Affordable Care Act but remains unfinished and inoperable. In the meantime, people seeking to enroll in Medicaid are being directed to www.Healthcare.gov. Although CMS and advocacy groups contend that the state ended in-person Medicaid enrollment assistance on January 1 of this year, the state disputes it. An article by **Tom Wilemon** in the July 14, 2014 *Tennessean* reported Tennessee TennCare Director **Darin Gordon** disputing claims that DHS offices throughout the state stopped in-person assistance: “He contends that the state does provide direct application assistance in every county by having self-service computer kiosks and people who meet the federal criteria [volunteers?] to counsel people on enrolling at healthcare.gov.”

The “Can’t Afford It” Argument—Not So Fast

Despite the many reports published by health economists and advisors from near and far that speak to the economic advantages of an expansion, opponents cling fiercely to the “we can’t afford it” argument. In response to a recent local turned national news story about a Maryville couple that separated to keep their health insurance, Senate Speaker **Ron Ramsey** commented that the couple’s situation was “tragic” but Tennessee taxpayers cannot afford a Medicaid expansion. A July 2014 report released by the White House Council of Economic Advisers suggests otherwise (see July 2014 White House report: “Missed Opportunities: The Consequences of State Decisions Not To Expand Medicaid.”

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/missed_opportunities_medicaid_0.pdf). According to the report, a Medicaid expansion in Tennessee will result in **234,000 additional people with insurance** coverage between 2014 and 2016, a **net increase in federal spending in Tennessee of \$5.1 billion** between 2014 and 2016, an **increase in employment for 21,700 workers** between 2014 and 2017, and an **increase in gross domestic product of \$3.8 billion** for the years 2014 through 2017.

A 2012 economic impact study conducted by researchers at the University of Memphis estimated the total cost of expansion to be about \$1.08 billion for 2014 through 2019 (see David M. Mirvis, MD and Cyril Chang, PhD. “Tennessee’s Option to Expand Medicaid Coverage: What Are the Issues?” at

http://www.memphis.edu/mlche/pdfs/medicaidexpansionarticle_mirvischang.pdf).

Does Lower Bottom Line for Tennessee Budget Drive Policy on Medicaid?

Medicaid budget meetings over the last eight months have reportedly focused on keeping new Medicaid enrollment numbers as low as possible **in an effort to maintain a balanced state budget. Yet the decision to not expand Medicaid deprives the state of at least \$2.3 million each and every day**—increasing budget shortfalls. Could it be that Tennessee Medicaid administrators haven’t implemented hospital signups, dropped in-person Medicaid enrollment assistance, and let the new website implementation slide in order to limit the number of new Tennessee Medicaid recipients?

In the meantime, Tennessee hospitals in both large urban and smaller rural community economies are squeezed by uncompensated care and individuals and families suffer. If our state government is serious about improving the health and productivity of Tennesseans, we will begin to see decisions, policies, and actions that

align with the goal of a healthy Tennessee instead of politically driven pushback. **If other states can make population health a priority and do so in a fiscally sound way, so can Tennessee.**



TennCare, Medicaid Expansion, and CHIP (August 2014)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Lawsuit Seeks to Help Citizens Eligible for Medicaid

On July 23, 2014, the **Southern Poverty Law Center**, **Tennessee Justice Center**, and the **National Health Law Program** filed a civil action lawsuit (*Melissa Wilson, et. al. v. Darin Gordon*) against Tennessee. **Darin Gordon** is the director of TennCare—Tennessee’s Medicaid program. According to the lawsuit, TennCare officials have adopted policies and engaged in practices that deprive thousands of eligible Tennesseans from Medicaid coverage. The lawsuit alleges that these policies and practices have resulted in some citizens—from newborn babies to seniors with serious medical conditions—going long periods without needed health care. The lawsuit specifically alleges that TennCare decisions to discontinue in-person assistance for Medicaid applicants and arbitrarily terminate coverage for newborns after hospital discharge violates federal law. Tennessee is the first state to be sued over Medicaid enrollment policies since passage of the Affordable Care Act. The August 14, 2014 *Tennessean* article “TennCare call center has no answers” details what has been happening: <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/health/2014/08/13/tenncare-suit-reveals-call-center-flaws/14032687/>

U.S. House Forms State Medicaid Expansion Causus

Over 25 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, including Rep. **Steve Cohen** (D-Tennessee), have formed the State Medicaid Expansion Caucus. According to caucus co-chairs Rep. **G. K. Butterfield** (D-North Carolina) and Rep. **Hank Johnson** (D-Georgia), the caucus “will highlight the need for recalcitrant states to expand Medicaid through floor speeches, op-eds, social media posts, and discussions with their colleagues and constituents.” This caucus will provide an additional and powerful layer of advocacy to current state efforts to push for Medicaid expansion.

Dollars for CHIP

Federal funding for **CoverKids**, Tennessee’s version of the federal Children’s Health Insurance Program (**CHIP**), is set to expire this October. The program covers around 68,000 children in Tennessee and is available to children in low to moderate income families. CHIP was first enacted in 1997 and has been renewed over time. In 2009, President Obama renewed and expanded the program for five years and now it is once again up for funding renewal. This time around, however, the congressional committees that authorize and oversee CHIP’s funding renewal have taken an unprecedented extra step and asked state governors to provide feedback on “whether and how the program should be extended.” Since all things health care seem to be political at this moment, we should not be surprised if CHIP becomes the next political battle ground. CoverKids makes health care affordable for working parents of thousands of Tennessee children. We want to urge Governor **Bill Haslam** to support expansion of this incredibly important program. League members should be prepared to write letters—lots of letters!



Locked Out—TennCare and Medicaid Expansion (September 2014)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Update on *Wilson v. Gordon*

On July 23, 2014, the National Health Law Program (NHeLP), Southern Poverty Law Center, and Tennessee Justice Center filed suit in federal court (*Melissa Wilson, et. al. v. Darin Gordon*) against TennCare Director **Darin Gordon**. This lawsuit was the first challenge to a state Medicaid program since enactment of the Affordable Care Act and alleged that certain TennCare policies and practices violate federal law and the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause. Specifically, the lawsuit alleged that TennCare enrollment practices have resulted in unreasonable delays in application decisions and that TennCare officials have

failed to “provide the plaintiff class with an opportunity for a fair hearing on any delayed adjudication.” What this means is that newborns, pregnant women and children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are going months without needed medical care, even though they are eligible for services.

On September 2, 2014, US District Court Judge **Todd J. Campbell** ruled in favor of the plaintiff class, ordered TennCare officials to provide an opportunity for a fair hearing on any delayed application decision, and set out a timeline for hearings. The Court’s ruling stipulates that when an individual applies for TennCare and does not receive a determination/eligibility decision within 45 days (90 days for applications on the basis of disability), that individual is entitled to a fair hearing within 45 days (90 days for applications based on disability) of after the individual requests the hearing. This ruling is a major win for eligible individuals and families that have been eligible for but **LOCKED OUT** of health care services.

Medicaid Expansion

Governor **Bill Haslam** recently said that the state may submit a proposal to DHS this fall with the intention to cover more Tennesseans. Unfortunately, he disclosed no new details about how the plan will work. While we wait, Tennessee is **losing \$2.7 million a day** in federal funding. Rural areas of the state, which often have higher rates of poverty, chronic disease, older citizens, and a heavier reliance on public insurance (Medicaid/Medicare) than urban areas, are being hit particularly hard by the failure to expand Medicaid. And hundreds of thousands of hard working people in Tennessee continue without health care.

The **ACA Coalition Rural Ambassador Meeting** was held Friday, August 22 and Saturday, August 23. **Sue Bredensteiner** attended both sessions of the program. The goal of the meeting was to develop community-specific strategies to support closing the health care coverage gap in Tennessee. Friday’s session included discussions about rural hospital viability, or more accurately lack of viability, without Medicaid expansion, the diversity of pro-expansion support throughout the state (religious, media, business, local government), and the *Wilson v. Gordon* case. The Saturday session focused on advocacy and emphasized the following points:

- As a constituent and registered voter, your voter registration card represents an important **CURRENCY** that is the “ticket to successful advocacy.”
- This year, there will be seven new senators and twelve new faces in the house. These are new opportunities to make the case for a Medicaid expansion.
- We need to find more ways to amplify the voices of people who are living in the Gap and use stories as an advocacy tool. Retired nurses across the state are ready to help record 1000 stories in 90 days. **The story line number is 615-900-GAP3.**

TennCare Assistance Training

Tennessee Justice Center is holding a TennCare Assistance Training next week. The purpose of the training is to assist advocates in helping people who are stuck in the TennCare application loop. The session will be held Monday, September 22 from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm at Saint Thomas Hospital West, Conference Dining Room B, 4220 Harding Pike, Nashville, Tennessee 37205. If you are unable to attend the training in person, you may view the webinar. To RSVP for the in-person session or the webinar, visit www.tjc-training.eventbrite.com.



Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (October 2014)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Just How Expensive is Politics

In an October 13 *Tennessean* article entitled, “Haslam must walk a fine political line on Medicaid,” **Frank Daniels** describes the political challenges facing the governor as he considers and publicly articulates his thoughts about the possibility of Medicaid expansion. In May of this year, the legislature placed the expansion ball in their own court by requiring legislative approval of any decisions relating to Medicaid

expansion. Governor **Bill Haslam** now has to craft and negotiate a plan that will expand access to health coverage for low income Tennesseans and pass legislative muster. Daniels ends his piece mentioning the 800 plus lives that could be saved through Medicaid expansion and states the following: “Politics should not be so expensive.”

There is hope that after November elections, legislators will be less pressed to fight expansion and more inclined to work with the Governor to craft a Tennessee-branded expansion plan. While we wait and hope for anti-expansion heads to cool in the post-election season, let’s review the ongoing costs of the decision to **NOT** expand Medicaid in Tennessee.

Money

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the federal government funds 100 percent of the cost of Medicaid expansion through 2016. The federal share then gradually declines to 90 percent by 2020. According to the Tennessee Division of Health Care Finance Administration, Tennessee would spend \$200 million in state funds but receive **\$6.5 billion from the federal government**.

Jobs

The Affordable Care Act contains several cost containment provisions including cuts to Medicare reimbursement. The Medicaid expansion, by reducing the amount of uncompensated care hospitals provide, was intended to offset loss of revenues from ACA cost containment provisions. While it appears that ACA cost containment has worked to slow the growth of health costs—health care price inflation is now at its lowest level in 50 years—hospitals throughout the state are struggling to provide the same level of uncompensated care with reduced revenues. Vanderbilt Medical Center, Baptist Memorial Health System, Erlanger Health System, and many rural hospitals throughout the state have had to address budget deficits through layoffs, hiring freezes, and other cost containment measures. **This amounts to lost jobs, understaffed medical facilities, and injury to local economies.**

Lives

In a Harvard study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2012, researchers compared mortality and other variables in three states that expanded Medicaid and states that did not expand Medicaid. In this study, researchers found that Medicaid expansions in three states were associated with a significant reduction in adult mortality, specifically a 6.1 percent reduction in all-cause mortality. The greatest reductions in mortality occurred among older adults, nonwhites, and residents in poorer counties. When researchers at the University of Memphis applied these results to Tennessee, they learned that **TENNESSEE MEDICAID EXPANSION WOULD RESULT IN 853 FEWER DEATHS PER YEAR.**

Lower Rate of Uninsured

According to a recently conducted Gallop-Healthways Well-Being survey, our neighboring states of Arkansas and Kentucky lead the pack with the sharpest reductions in the uninsured rate since the ACA insurance mandate took effect at the beginning of the year. In Arkansas, the uninsured rate dropped 10.1 percentage points between January 2013 and mid-year 2014. In Kentucky, the uninsured rate declined 8.5 percentage points. **Results from this survey show substantial reductions in the uninsured rate for all states that implemented Medicaid expansions and state-run health exchanges compared to states that opted out of both these actions.**

Timely Access to Medical Services for Vulnerable People

New Medicaid enrollees are more likely to be medically vulnerable—individuals who self-report fair or poor health, people who are older and non-white. **A decision by state leadership to opt out of expansion locks out folks who need health care the most.** According to the Harvard study cited above, Medicaid expansion resulted in a 21 percent reduction in delayed care.

Public Trust

According to a December 2013 Vanderbilt poll, a substantial majority of Tennessee voters (63 percent) support Medicaid expansion. Many of Tennessee’s physicians, hospitals, nurses, community health centers, and academic medical centers support expansion. Individuals and families with health care needs and the inability to pay market prices for private plan premiums also support the expansion.

The state’s inaction on Medicaid expansion can weaken public trust, particularly since the state has had to recently defend a backlog of Medicaid applications and its treatment of eligible, but not yet enrolled people. Finally, as more and more “red” states such as Arizona, Utah, and Pennsylvania implement expansion or expansion look-a-likes, the pressure builds for Tennessee to get onboard. Should Governor **Bill Haslam** move forward with a plan to expand Medicaid, he will find eleven other Republican governors (or maybe more depending on the timeline) **have already taken advantage of an opportunity for their citizens that’s too good to pass up.**

