

Medicaid commissioner talks numbers with Alabama lawmakers



A hearing on Medicaid funding drew a standing-room-only crowd to a committee room at the Alabama State House today. Medicaid Commissioner gave a slide presentation on Medicaid statistics. (Mike Cason/mcason@al.com) ()



By **Mike Cason** | mcason@al.com

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Medicaid Commissioner Stephanie Azar talked to state legislators today about the agency's need for more money and about who uses the massive federal-state healthcare program.

Lawmakers held the first of what is expected to be a series of hearings that they have said would help them get a better grasp on costs at the agency that is by far the largest consumer of money from the state General Fund.

Gov. Robert Bentley requested a General Fund appropriation of \$785 million for Medicaid next year, \$100 million more than this year.

The Legislature overrode Bentley's veto and passed a budget giving Medicaid \$700 million from the General Fund, a \$15 million increase and more than a third of the \$1.85 billion General Fund.

In a slide presentation, Azar showed that Medicaid started this year with a \$37 million carryover and relied on \$36 million in one-time funds.

The absence of that \$73 million for next year is one reason for the \$100 million request, she said.

Azar, who has said a number of times that Alabama Medicaid is a "bare bones" program, provided a chart that showed the annual cost per enrollee last year was almost exactly the same as in 2008, about \$5,800.

But the number of enrollees has increased from 756,000 to slightly more than one million during that time.

Other charts showed that the General Fund provided only 11 percent of the \$6.1 billion cost of Alabama's Medicaid program in 2015.

Federal funds provided 68 percent, and other state sources besides the General Fund provided 21 percent.

Azar gave a breakdown of the roughly one million Alabamians who receive services from Medicaid:

- Age 65 and over and in poverty -- 9 percent of recipients; 18 percent of expenditures.
- Disabled and blind -- 22 percent of recipients; 45 percent of expenditures.
- Children in families below 146 percent of the federal poverty rate -- 51 percent of recipients; 25 percent of expenditures.
- Others, including pregnant women, parent caretakers and family planning services -- 18 percent of recipients; 12 percent of expenditures.

Medicaid by the numbers

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