
Pennsylvania

Legislator calls for hearings on murderous effects of medical cuts

Pennsylvania State Representative Harold James (D-Philadelphia), chairman of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, issued a statement on Oct. 31, calling for hearings to be convened on “the deadly and devastating impact” that Gov. Tom Ridge’s cuts in medical services are having on the people of the state. On May 16, 1996, Ridge signed into law Act 35, which declared 220,000 persons ineligible for medical assistance. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., during his campaign for the Democratic Party Presidential nomination, made Ridge’s policy a national election issue, comparing it to the crimes for which Nazi leaders were tried and convicted at Nuremberg, and calling for Ridge’s impeachment. LaRouche forecast that within about six months, 3,000 to 4,000 of these people would die, as a direct result of the cuts.

Citizens throughout the state are now coming forward, presenting evidence of this murderous outcome.

Representative James, in his Oct. 31 statement, said: “I recently asked that research be done on the impact of Ridge’s medical cuts so far. The preliminary report I have received reveals a picture of death, devastation, and threat to innocent lives beyond what many of us thought possible in a civilized society. This includes:

- “The mass layoffs of medical personnel at hospitals and other cutbacks, including the severe restriction of emergency room care for persons without medical coverage, and the replacement of nurses with unlicensed substitutes—which, according to the testimony of nurses before the Pennsylvania House Committee on Health and Human Services, has already led to the unnecessary suffering and death of patients;
- “The cutoff of people in the middle of life-saving medical procedures, such as chemotherapy;
- “The cutoff of mentally disabled people from treatment and medication, leading to at least one tragic death already, and inhumane conditions for many others;
- “The denial of essential medications and procedures to diabetics, severe asthmatics, people with HIV and other life-threatening conditions;
- “The devastation of the working poor, who cannot afford to purchase life-saving medications or procedures;
- “The cutoff of persons seeking rehabilitation from drug addiction.”

James reported that his constituents had presented him with petitions signed by over 7,000 people in his area, of all

colors and ethnic backgrounds, asking that he take action toward the impeachment of Governor Ridge. “This is an overwhelming demand for action, which I respect,” he said.

“Governor Ridge must sit down with our legislative leadership, including the Democratic chairman of the Health and Human Services Committee and other pertinent legislators, and work out a plan whereby adequate medical services will be provided to those being cut off of medical assistance.

“At the same time, I am calling for public hearings, to thoroughly document the deadly impact of Gov. Ridge’s actions. I believe, based on the information already at hand, plus the additional information we will gather as people’s health further deteriorates, that Gov. Ridge’s actions will rise to the level of an impeachable offense, and a resolution to impeach Ridge will be introduced into the House of Representatives.

“The objective of impeachment would be to charge the Governor with gross misbehavior in office under Article VI of the Pennsylvania Constitution, since he knew, or should have known, that his medical cuts would result in the wrongful death or injury of innocent persons. I warned Gov. Ridge on the floor of the House of Representatives on May 15 [1996], that ‘when Pennsylvanians begin to die as a result of his cuts in the state medical assistance program, that, upon proper complaint, I foresee an indictment being considered against him.’

“An impeachment resolution will demonstrate that the people will hold government leaders responsible for the Gingrich-style, mean-spirited policies that cause injury and loss of innocent lives.”

The deadly impact of Act 35

The following is a summary of some of the testimony presented to Representative James, and released in a report issued by his office. The full text was published in New Federalist newspaper on Nov. 11, 1996.

Prof. Laura Gasparis Vonfrolio, Sept. 12, testimony to the Pennsylvania House Committee on Health and Human Services:

Nurses in Philadelphia hospitals report short-staffing that jeopardizes patient care, as registered nurses are replaced by technicians. (See *EIR*, Oct. 18, p. 11, for extensive excerpts



An encampment of homeless people in Philadelphia, hosted by the Kensington Welfare Rights Association, in July 1996, calls itself "Ridgeville." Governor Ridge's legislation, throwing 220,000 working poor off medical assistance, is producing a rising toll of death and misery in the state.

from her testimony.)

Community Legal Services (CLS), Philadelphia:

People are not notified of being cut off from medical assistance (MA), until they go to see their doctor or pharmacist. One staff member reported that a man walked in, whose diagnosis was panic disorder. He only had enough medication to last three more days, and was so frightened, that he gave himself only half a dose. "He walked in here, he was shaking, he could not sign his name to the form I asked him to sign, since he was shaking so much. He was crying the entire hour he was in my office, as I spent an hour on the telephone talking to the welfare department, trying to find out why it is, he never received notice, and why it is, he'd been terminated, when he so clearly met their requirements for getting benefits."

Philadelphia Unemployment Project:

"I have this one lady who has breast cancer, and was scheduled to have her tests done. I'm working with the hospital now. I consider this to be life-threatening; she has breast cancer, and she needs chemotherapy. . . . She was on medical assistance and she was scheduled for her next treatment, and was cut off. . . . She has to take the treatments a couple of times a month."

Philadelphia Inquirer, Aug. 21, 1996:

Wilson Lescay, an unemployed Cuban refugee and diagnosed schizophrenic, was told that he no longer qualified for public assistance because he was not a U.S. citizen. Nine days later, he killed himself.

Carla West:

Mrs. West is the mother of Markeis Baylor, the 18-year-old mental patient who murdered his grandparents in July, and then killed himself after wounding a police officer. She says that Markeis was not properly supervised, due to "state regulations" caused by budget cuts and lack of mental health personnel.

Philadelphia Unemployment Project:

A young lady with asthma has not been able to get an inhaler and medication, since she was cut off medical assistance. She is unable to work as a result.

Philadelphia Legislative office:

"A young man came in the office [in mid-July] asking us if there was anywhere he could go to get insulin. He stated that if he didn't get insulin, he would be dead by next week. He was living in Philadelphia and had his medical card taken away. He was just informed at Aldan district next door that his medical card was taken away."

Philadelphia Legislative office:

Diabetics must check sugar once or twice a day, called an active check. This involves sticking a needle in your finger, placing the blood on a strip, and putting it in a machine. The state stopped paying for these needles as of June. Needles cost about \$44 to \$50 for two months supply, if you do it once a day. Poor diabetics can't afford to pay for it.

Beaver County Cancer and Heart Association:

The association operates a free prescription program, in

cooperation with about 70 pharmaceutical companies that will provide free medicines to indigent persons. There are about 400 people enrolled in the program. The recent cuts in state welfare have made it more difficult for poor people to get medicine at reduced costs, so many are turning to the BCCCHA, which does not have the money to cope with all the demand.

Many persons in the Beaver County program must frequently choose between buying food, paying utility bills, or buying their medicine.

The Employment Project, Philadelphia:

One of the persons seeking employment was an HIV-positive man, who was cut off MA, thus terminating any treatment or medication for his condition.

Interview with family of patient:

Mrs. Pearl E. is 47 years old; her husband is 71, retired on Social Security, Medicare. Pearl was denied MA. Although she had worked all her life, she had stopped working due to diabetes and shortness of breath.

She complained of severe abdominal pains [in about July], and was referred to Misericordia Hospital by a doctor at a city health clinic. The hospital informed her that her condition was very serious, that fibroid tumors were growing rapidly in her uterus, and that surgery (hysterectomy) was needed. She has not had the surgery for lack of medical coverage, and also has not received adequate check-ups.

She had a heart attack in late September, and went to the emergency room at Allegheny University Hospital. They used a balloon to open her blood vessels (angioplasty). She was in the hospital for 12 days.

This procedure was inadequate, as she had a second heart attack Oct. 14, and is now in intensive care at Misericordia Hospital.

Interview with patient:

Karyn H., 25, has a serious thyroid condition, and was cut off medical assistance on Sept. 15. She requires a blood test, including a thyroid screen, every 1-2 months, costing about \$900, and a special test called a thyroid uptake and scan, costing \$1,100, which determines whether her thyroid has become cancerous. She received her last scan in November 1995, and her doctors recommend another one immediately. She has postponed all necessary testing for lack of medical assistance.

Community Legal Services:

Three people who worked in a "sheltered workshop," run by the Cambria County Association for the Blind and Handicapped, in Johnstown, were cut off MA this summer: one with severe mental illness (chronic depression), one mentally retarded, and the other physically disabled. They work 100 hours a month or more, and make sub-minimum wage. The reason they can be paid sub-minimum wage, is because they are certified disabled by the federal government. They were cut off MA under Act 35, because Act 35 says persons have to work 100 hours a month at least at minimum wage. One needs medication for psychiatric illness; none have had access

to doctors or medications since they were cut off. The situation was brought to the attention of Department of Public Welfare Commissioner Houston in August, who declined to intervene.

Interview with patient, Philadelphia:

Felix S., 40, received a liver transplant at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital on June 20, 1995. Since he was on MA at the time, the operation was paid for by the state, along with the necessary medications, including the anti-rejection drug neoral, which costs over \$500 a month. The medication is taken every 12 hours, and prevents the body from rejecting the new organ, which would lead to the death of the patient.

"Almost a year after the transplant, when everybody got cut off, I got cut off of the medical, for prescriptions, and visits to the doctor. I was completely unable to get them. So I had to go to the free health center to get some of my medication. . . . I couldn't get the more expensive ones. . . .

"I've been unable to work. . . . I'm still in recuperation. My wife worked, and they claimed that with my wife's income, it overpasses the income limit. She got a job after the transplant, September 1995. . . .

"I wrote a letter to the director of DPA, who said there's nothing they could do, because my wife exceeded the limits."

Interview with patient, Lehigh County:

Al W., 42, received a liver transplant in August 1995. He is married with children 14 and 20 years old. He was approved for Social Security disability; his wife was laid off and received unemployment benefits. Their combined income put them over the limit for MA. For a while, he had no medical insurance at all. He found a plan, which involves a four-hour trip to a hospital in a neighboring county to get his medicine.

"I am skipping one of the drugs on occasion, because I don't have the money to buy it. A lot of times there's not a lot of food in the refrigerator."

Interview with patient, Philadelphia:

Milton W., 46, had a valve placed in his heart in July 1993, an operation paid for by state MA. He still has an enlarged heart, and must take a blood test once a month, and a "sonic boom," or sonar, test of his heart once a year. He also must take heart medications which cost about \$87 a month. He recently obtained a job working 35 hours a week at \$10 an hour. He was informed by the doctor at Temple University Hospital that his medical card was now invalid. This has forced him to delay the sonar examination of this heart until at least December, when he expects to be laid off from his job.

Interview with patient, Montgomery County:

Robert S., 46, has suffered from severe pain in his abdomen, including blood in his urine, which he has been told could be either a kidney stone or cancer. The job he found involved too much physical activity, given his medical condition. He applied for MA on Aug. 29, and was turned down. A doctor has informed him that he needs a procedure called an intravenous pyelogram (IVP), which costs above \$600. He postponed this procedure, hoping that a less-expensive ultrasound

procedure might be adequate.

"I've postponed this treatment because I was hoping that some other procedure would be done, and the other thing, too, is that I have to use as much time as possible to get some money together to pay my rent, or else I'm going to be homeless in a month."

Interview with patient, Allegheny County:

Don and Barbara K. were told by DPW that they make too much to have a medical card—Don gets a \$625 a month social security check. She is 55, he is 62. She needs a hip replacement, has angina, and kidney stones. Don takes high blood pressure pills and high cholesterol pills.

"Oct. 31 is the last day that we have on this card, and that's the end of our medicine. We don't know what in the hell we're going to do. . . ."

"The lady down at the welfare office, said that she read some kind of new laws that Ridge wrote, something about working 100 hours a month, I didn't understand that. Well, I'm not going to qualify, because I can't work 100 hours a month."

Armstrong County Low Income Rights Organization:

A woman called to explain the predicament of her sister, who is in her 30s, and has cancer. She has had several lumps removed from her breast. "Well, they found another lump, and her sister is working, and her sister found out that she would not have an access card. She was told she had to go to the hospital and have some tests done. She says, 'I'm not going, because how am I going to pay it?' She was also informed by the hospital that she would have to pay \$150 co-pay."

Clarion County Welfare Rights Organization:

A 23-year-old woman on MA had a hysterectomy in April, after being diagnosed with cancer of the uterus. She now has a lump in her breast, and has delayed going to the hospital because of the \$150 deductible.

Philadelphia Inquirer, June 25, 1996:

Eagleville Hospital has announced that it will lay off about 60 employees—25% of its workforce—because of cuts in state medical benefits to welfare recipients. Eagleville and Valley Forge Medical Center, two Montgomery County hospitals certified to provide inpatient detoxification and drug-and alcohol-rehabilitation services for medical-assistance recipients, receive most of their patients from Philadelphia and, therefore, are preparing for drastic funding cuts.

Philadelphia Unemployment Project:

One gentleman went to the emergency room because he was having severe stomach pains. He was told that he needed to have an ultra-sound done immediately, in order to rule out that this was a kidney problem. The man only worked part-time, because of his pain. But instead of the hospital emergency room giving this man the ultrasound, letting [him] have the testing done right there in the hospital, they turned him away. He was not qualified for medical assistance under Act 35.

The child victims of Bush's crack epidemic

by Don Pilson

The author, a social worker with Child Protective Services in Washington, D.C., delivered the following testimony at Citizens' Court Hearings, held in the nation's capital on Oct. 5. Titled "Merchandizing Death," the hearings were called to present the evidence of George Bush's role in the spread of drugs and guns in U.S. inner cities. Other witnesses included Dennis Speed, Northeast Coordinator of the Schiller Institute, Gail Billington of EIR, and Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, MD, director of the Abundant Life Clinic in Washington, and Spokesman for the Hon. Minister Louis Farrakhan.

For the past six years I've worked as a licensed social worker in Child Protective Services for the District government. For the first three and a half years, I worked the 4 p.m. to midnight shift on the 24-hour hotline, receiving and investigating reports of child neglect, often having to take children away from their parents due to severe maltreatment. Over the recent two and a half years, I've worked extensively with children who are in foster care due to physical or sexual abuse. While I don't have official or exact figures, I think most of my colleagues would agree that more than 90% of the perpetrators in reported cases of child abuse and neglect in the District of Columbia are regular users of crack cocaine! In fact, should we succeed in eradicating the scourge of crack cocaine in the District, I and most of my colleagues would soon be out of work.

I was first confronted with the devastating impact of crack cocaine in D.C. one night during my first week in 24-Hour Intake six years ago. I was alerted that evening to the soon-to-become familiar crackling sound of police radios, as officers routinely entered our office with yet another victim of abuse or neglect to be turned over to Child Protective Services. The victim in this case was a three-week-old baby, whose mother had approached a stranger at the corner of 4th and Florida Avenue and asked her to hold the baby for a few minutes while she ducked into the Safeway for a few items. The mother then disappeared, and was not heard from again until she called me 10 days later, indignantly demanding her baby back. Needless to say, she had not gone for milk and bread, but to see the "crack man," after having moments earlier sold all of her monthly food stamp allotment at a bargain-basement price, with three weeks yet to go in the month.