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By **Ashley Lopez**  
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## **New 'free market' think tank asks feds to approve state Medicaid overhaul**

Foundation for Government Accountability CEO Tarren Bragdon (Pic via [floridafga.org](http://floridafga.org))

Tarren Bragdon, the president of the conservative Foundation for Government Accountability, has sent a letter to federal health officials lobbying for approval of the state's Medicaid reform plans.

Florida's program overhaul would move Medicaid beneficiaries into private managed care plans, expanding a program that has been implemented the past few years in a handful of counties. Health advocates and Medicaid beneficiaries have criticized the plans to expand the program.

Bragdon's new Naples-based "free market" public policy group, which has so far declined to disclose the source of its funding, is telling federal officials in a letter that the program "is a decided success."

Bragdon's new group has ties to right-wing organizations such as the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation. These groups also have deep ties to the controversial Koch brothers. The billionaire brothers have pumped millions of dollars into groups that lobby and advocate on behalf of big business and seek to undermine labor rights around the country.

The Foundation for Government Accountability has already made significant inroads with Florida's government. One of the Foundation's policy pamphlets was cited in the state's defense of its new welfare drug testing law, during a challenge brought by the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida. The Foundation report claimed that a decline in the number of applicants approved for welfare benefits was because of the new law. A judge threw out the study earlier this month, claiming it was "not competent expert opinion." The Bush-appointed judge wrote that "even a cursory review of certain assumptions in the pamphlet undermines its conclusions."

Bragdon writes in his new letter:

I write to urge the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to approve the six pending state plan amendments, waivers, and amendments to waivers requested by the State of Florida that would allow for a planned statewide reform building on Florida's successful Medicaid Reform Pilot.

Enclosed please find my 24-page study, *Florida's Medicaid Reform Shows the Way to Improve Health, Increase Satisfaction, and Control Costs*, published by the Heritage Foundation, that compares the Reform Pilot to traditional Medicaid in other states, non-Reform managed care in the rest of Florida, and commercial HMOs in several areas.

It is critical CMS has factual research on hand. The decision CMS makes regarding Florida's waiver and amendment requests is of significant consequence to Medicaid patients and taxpayers across our state.

Bragdon's report is currently one of the only studies touting the success of the Medicaid Reform Pilot. His study claims the Pilot program has "improved the health of enrolled patients, achieved high patient satisfaction, and kept cost increases below average, saving Florida up to \$118 million annually."

Georgetown University, as well as a slew of public interest groups, have said the Reform Pilot has not shown any clear signs of saving money.

Florida PIRG, a public interest research group, has said that the state's new plan is "essentially taking a failed five county experiment that was rife with fraud and expanding it to all sixty-seven Florida counties." The group has also called the state's plans a "recipe for a massive taxpayer rip-off."