



Locals helping lobby today for Medicaid expansion

By: Heather Rutz – March 14, 2013

Medicaid expansion advocates traveled to Columbus Thursday to lobby for Ohio to extend coverage to additional residents through federal health care reform.

An estimated 45 people from Lima joined 600 advocates from across the state at a large public demonstration event at the Vern Riffe Center. The local group was organized by Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Allen, Auglaize and Hardin Counties and Partnership for Violence Free Families.

Expanding Medicaid helps the working poor access health care, especially mental health care that would otherwise be unavailable, advocates said.

“People have the misconception that this is for people on welfare. It’s not. It’s for people who are working and who don’t have benefits,” said Michael Schoenhofer, executive director of the mental health board.

Ohio Gov. John Kasich attended the rally and offered stories from people who have shared with him their health insurance and care needs.

Kasich wants to accept the additional federal money that would expand Medicaid coverage to people at 138 percent of the poverty level, adding another 275,000 poor Ohioans to Medicaid coverage. He’s facing opposition from conservatives in his own party who don’t want the expansion but receiving support from many Democrats and people in social service and health care fields.

Conservative groups urged legislators Wednesday to reject Kasich’s proposal. People representing the Cato Institute and Buckeye Institute testified at a House subcommittee the program would ultimately be costly to the state and do little to reduce the number of uninsured.

House Speaker William Batchelder made clear the Republican caucus opposed the federal health care reform law, but said some form of what Kasich wants could ultimately be approved, according to the Columbus Dispatch.

Throughout the day, the group used social media to make its argument for the Medicaid expansion. Those interested can follow the group @WeCarePeople and the issue using #Medicaid Now on Twitter, through the We Care People Facebook page and on the YouTube We Care People channel.