



April 4, 2017

Let's Eliminate Medicaid Copays in Illinois

Being born in Cabrini-Green and growing up in Austin and Englewood, I always appreciated the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was shot and killed in Memphis 49 years ago. So here is a story from Dr. King's life that we all could learn from:

In early 1965, just a few months after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson was concerned that there was little political will in Congress to deal with Voting Rights. The president knew that he needed public sentiment to gather momentum before he could introduce and quickly pass a Voting Rights bill. So, he called Dr. King on the phone to ask for more time to bring over more Southern "moderates" and the rest of the country to the cause. Dr. King told the president that Blacks had waited too long for too little. So in response, President Lyndon Johnson famously told him, "then go out there and make it possible for me to do the right thing."

In essence, President Johnson told Dr. King: "Make Me Do It."

So that is what Dr. King and civil rights leaders in the movement did. Using non-violence and love and fact-filled arguments, they organized a campaign based in Selma, and they made it happen. The Voting Rights Act was passed later in 1965.

And, in our own time we have examples of people rising up in the spirit of "Make Us Do It" - from women's rights; to electing Harold Washington as Chicago's first black mayor; to marriage equality; to equal rights for Latinos.

And, it was the hard work, persistence and activism of many people that we were able to Ban the Box on state job applications and seal the records of people convicted of certain non-violent felonies, giving people better chances at education, jobs and housing.

In just the past few weeks, peoples' activism at town hall meetings throughout the country made our current Congress reconsider and withdraw its ill-advised plan to repeal and replace Obamacare. People came together, came as one, to fight for justice, and we won – at least for now.

Other issues demand activism. Because people with Medicaid often can't get the medications they need because they can't afford the copays, I recently proposed legislation, House Amendment 1 to House Bill 236, to eliminate all copays for Medicaid services in Illinois. There is opposition to the cost of \$115 million, but that just tells me that lots of poor people pay lots of money on copays, or a lot of poor people go without needed services. A family dependent on Medicaid is more than likely unemployed or among the working poor. Income

inequality forces dependence on LINK, WIC, Section 8 and other government benefits, so how can we expect a family receiving Medicaid to afford copays? But, again, let's remember "Make Us Do It." It will only be through activism and making the argument and showing up in Springfield, town hall meetings, meetings at City Hall, County Board meetings, LSC meetings, PTA meetings, and block club meetings that we can push for good policy. Let's work together to eliminate Medicaid copays in Illinois.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSF', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District