



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

September 16, 2021

Dear Governor Noem and South Dakota Legislators:

I write to you as the Bishop of the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at the direction of our yearly assembly, which has charged me with the responsibility of formally asking you to expand Medicaid. As Bishop, I represent about 200 communities of faith across the state of South Dakota. These communities, like the larger communities in which they are found, are all unique – they are large, small, and in-between, and are made up of people from all walks of life, with varying opinions on the church, politics, and any number of subjects.

While I have no doubt that you have heard many arguments on all sides of this debate, I wish to bring to your attention our denomination's social statement on health care, "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor."¹ This document provides a biblical and theological argument in favor of Medicaid expansion, as it elevates the "biblical view that wholeness is a blessing that God intends for all (1 Thessalonians 5:23)"². Especially relevant to the Medicaid expansion debate are Sections Four and Five, which "are dedicated to specific recommendations about equitable access to healthcare for all, and provide ethical guidance."³ These sections state that, "...At a minimum, each person should have ready access to basic health care services,"⁴ and conclude that, "rather than encouraging privatization, the belief that health is a shared endeavor 'makes public health services...the foundation for any health system.'"⁵

The ELCA issued the statement in 2003, and we have come a long way as a state since then. Of course, the state government has played a role in that, and I thank you for your leadership and dedication as elected officials in striving to bring wholeness and healing to all people. Your conscientious effort to expand Medicaid now would be another

¹ "A Social Statement on health, healing and health care... Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor." Available at: <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HealthSS.pdf>.

² Theological Discernment Department, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor Social Statement Summary, page 1. Available at: https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HealthSS_Summary.pdf.

³ Ibid.

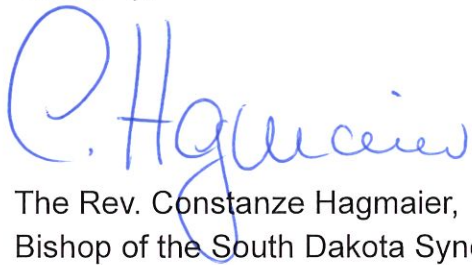
⁴ "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor," page 13.

⁵ "Social Statement Summary," page 1.

important step in doing just that. Therefore, on behalf of the South Dakota Synod, I urge you to adopt Medicaid expansion for our state during the 2022 Legislative Session.

I understand that expanding Medicaid is a complex issue, and that there are passionate, faithful people on different sides of this debate. I would welcome a solution-oriented and grace-filled conversation on this issue, if you wish to contact me about the contents of this letter. As we represent the people of South Dakota, it is our shared interest to serve all people well. On behalf of the South Dakota Synod, I am committed to doing that work alongside you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Hagmaier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

The Rev. Constanze Hagmaier,
Bishop of the South Dakota Synod, ELCA