

Southerners For Medicaid Expansion Digital Vigil: “One Night, Eight States, One Cause”

Texas And Other States - Judging by an online event occurring the evening of Thursday, Oct. 1st, Texas is not the only state whose leaders currently refuse to expand Medicaid.

“One night, eight states, one cause” was the tagline for a virtual town hall dubbed a “digital vigil” by recently formed social justice advocates Southerners For Medicaid Expansion (SME). Organized in August by North Carolina Justice Center (NCJC) in August, the SME claims coalition partners in eight “non-expansion” Southern states. They are uniting these states -- Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and North and South Carolina -- “to demand affordable healthcare for our essential workers, communities of color and rural hospitals,” according to a press release announcing their founding last August.

Nicole Dozier, Director of NCJC’s Health Advocacy project, noted in her introductory remarks that the Oct. 1st event honored “those who have tragically died and those who are still suffering unnecessarily because our states have refused to expand Medicaid.” She went on to enumerate North Carolina in the “mean-spirited minority” for “refusing coverage for working families.”

“These policies have caused great harm across our state,” she continued.

Many of the Texas-based virtual town halls conducted since COVID-19’s shutdown of society as we once knew it have echoed many of the themes which rang through the “Digital Vigil”: Minority populations’ and frontline workers’ amplified vulnerability to the novel coronavirus; the lack of adequate protections and health care for these sectors of the population; state leadership’s refusal to expand either Medicaid or ACA coverage; and the devastating effect on working and impoverished families’ bottom lines.

Dozier continued that “these policy decisions have caused great harm” in North Carolina: “In my opinion, these actions have failed the moral test of government. I believe...the government should be doing the work to make lives better for the people.” She concluded that it is not a partisan issue, but a human one.

The 90 minute program featured short videos addressing different aspects of the healthcare crisis, as well as segments honoring lives lost for just these reasons. Speakers included Stacey Abrams, the former Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives who won the most Democratic votes in the state’s history in her 2018 bid for its governorship; and activist minister Rev. Dr. William J. Barker II.