

Testimony: Bishop Walter L. Starghill, Jr.

Hearing: “Examining Pathways to Universal Health Coverage”

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

March 29th, 2022

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, thank you for holding this important hearing, and thank you Congresswoman Tlaib for inviting me to share my story here today.

My name is Bishop Walter L. Starghill, Jr. I am the Pastor of Face-to-Face Outreach Ministries based out of Eastern Michigan.

Back in 2009 I was under siege by an unknown illness. At that time, I, like millions of other Americans, didn't have any insurance.

As the illness worsened, I ended up having to go to the Emergency Room at Oakwood Hospital. I told the hospital staff that I didn't have any insurance, and they did a light checkup – taking my temperature and blood pressure. They said that I might have shingles, and charged me around \$800 dollars for those services. It took me almost 7 months to pay that bill back.

As my symptoms got worse and worse, I knew I couldn't go back to the Emergency Room because of how expensive it was. I found out about a pilot program at the Western Wayne Family Health Center from a friend who worked there, which offered affordable care even if you didn't have insurance, and found that they were able to take care of me for only \$20 per visit.

At that time, because I hadn't been able to access treatment, a tremendous Chicken-Pox like was rash spreading down the side of my face and had forced my eye closed. They gave me a shot, and immediately my eye popped back open and I started to feel better. According to the doctor, if they hadn't treated me when they did, I could've lost my eyesight in that eye. All because I was uninsured.

When you don't have insurance a lot of the time you just don't know what to do. After all, you don't have a doctor to go to for medical advice. Through that pilot program I was able to get medical treatment, I was able to get what was needed to heal myself in time. It could've gotten a lot worse, but I thank God that I got care and caught it in time.

As Obamacare came to the State of Michigan, I finally was able to get insurance and got to go to a regular doctor and address other serious medical issues that I hadn't been able to get treated. I went to the hospital and had a three day stay and no bills! I was comfortable, I wasn't worried about what I was going to have to do to pay the bill. I also have diabetes, and because I now had insurance coverage I was able to get my old treatment equipment replaced, all thanks to the Obamacare Affordable Care Act.

What I'm saying here today is simple – everybody needs to be covered. For many Americans, it makes the difference between life and death. For me, it easily could've meant losing my vision. Some people I know are eating dog food instead of meals to try to pay for their pills that keep them alive. Just because they have to pay for the basic necessities of life. That's the horrible reality of what it means to not have insurance in America's healthcare system.

This is not ok. To put this all into context I'd like to share a quick story from my work as a Pastor. I had the opportunity to go on a trip to Niagara Falls with a busload of my church members. It was quite a hot day, and one of my mothers in my church fell ill because of the heat. We had to call the Canadian emergency services and an ambulance came and took her to the hospital. At that point I started to worry for the simple reason that we were in a different country and they gave her all this care. We all well know that those tests would've costed three to four thousand dollars in America. But in Canada where they have universal healthcare coverage? At that time they actually took her to the hospital in an ambulance and did all those tests and the bill only came out to \$74 US dollars.

All I'm saying is that life is short. We don't know how it's gonna be. When we're young we run and jump and as we get older and older we see the failing of our bodies. The thing of it is that we NEED healthcare. We NEED a doctor. We NEED a medical support staff. We all NEED affordable healthcare – which this Congress and the United States NEEDS to give us.

I'm a living witness to how it has saved my life, changed my life, and improved my life. A lot of us out here are afraid for our futures, and we need you to let us know that you hear us, believe us, and that help is here and that our country – our government – cares for us.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, and providing me the opportunity to share my story.