

My name is Bill Kaufman, and I have lived in McVeytown for nearly my entire life. Over the years I have seen a lot of changes with healthcare in the area. One big change is that Geisinger recently took over my local and only hospital, Lewistown Hospital, and I'm concerned about what that means for patients like me.

When they bought my community hospital, Geisinger fortunately had to sign an agreement that said they would continue to work with all of its current insurance providers and bargain in good faith with them. But that agreement has an expiration date and from what I can see, looking westward, the campaign to get people to switch begins more or less immediately. How long after UPMC agreed to accept Highmark insurance did it start campaigning to reject it? This leaves people frightened about their futures. The truth is, without legislation, we don't know what Geisinger plans for our community hospital.

The concern isn't just theoretical. Where Geisinger has the ability to reject "outside" Medicare Advantage, they do. In Columbia County, folks with the wrong type of Medicare Advantage are being forced to choose between losing access to their community hospital, or losing the insurance of their choice because Geisinger has decided to only accept their own Medicare Advantage plan, Geisinger Gold.

I am retired and a veteran. My current insurance is HealthAmerica Medicare Advantage. It is a low cost plan that I can afford on my restricted income that gives me access to the hospital that is closest to me. I like my insurance. And I like having a real choice in my insurance. With these large health systems buying up community hospitals and then only accepting their own insurance plans, every year more and more Pennsylvanians are losing their ability to have that choice.

I have no problem with Geisinger--I used to work there and they are a leader in health care, but if big hospitals like Geisinger are going to dominate the provider market and then have their own insurance, they can't use that insurance plan to exclude patients. We need assurance that we can see our long-standing doctors and go to the hospital of our choice.

I'm worried that if so-called intergrated delivery networks continue to acquire and have the power reject competing insurance plans that we are failing to protect patients. I could very likely be one of those people who loses access to their doctors. I am a senior citizen. As I get older, having to travel farther to access my care harder and it is the last thing I want to do - and many of my friends feel the same way.

These hospitals are subsidized by seniors like me and I expect that our elected leaders will ensure that they act in the best interest of patients. That is why I am here to ask you to support this legislation. It helps protect my choice and access to the doctors and hospitals closest to me. Many Pennsylvanians are experiencing problems when giant healthcare monopolies taking over their local hospitals and denying them access to their long-standing doctors. Without this legislation, I could become one of those people with no protection.