

Hands Off Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid April 5, 2025

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jan Willinger, and I want to start off by thanking you for being here to support Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. These vital programs are the backbone of our nation's social safety net, and today, we are here to say Hands Off to any efforts to threaten them.

For decades, Social Security has been a promise made to every worker in this country. It's not a handout--it's an earned benefit. It's a promise that those who have worked hard their entire lives--paying into the system through their taxes--will have a safety net when they retire, when they can no longer work, or when they are faced with a disability. It's a promise that says we will take care of our elders, our disabled, and our most vulnerable.

We often hear of seniors struggling to live on Social Security--sadly, it's not a new story. But did you also know that in Lynchburg and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford and Campbell--we have almost 5,600 folks on SSI? Almost half of these neighbors are blind or otherwise disabled. They depend on these monthly checks to survive. Yet Social Security has already lost roughly 3000 employees. And plans have been put forth that threaten to cut more than 7000 additional workers. Social Security is a promise we've all paid into, and we will not stand by and let it be dismantled.

Now what about Medicare? Our healthcare system for seniors is a lifeline for millions of Americans. But the current administration seems to want to weaken, cut, or even privatize Medicare, placing the profits of big corporations ahead of the health and well-being of our families. This is not just wrong—it's dangerous. We're here today because we believe that healthcare is a right, not a privilege. We believe that no one should have to choose between paying for groceries or paying for life-saving medicine. Medicare is a bedrock of our social safety net that we must protect, now and always.

When it comes to Medicaid, I want to share a personal story. My wonderful young friends in Richmond are currently facing a parent's worst nightmare. Rachel and Josh welcomed their first child in February 2024. When she was just shy of eight months old, little Cassie was diagnosed with Krabbe disease, a terminal genetic disorder. Luckily for them, Josh had what would be considered "good" insurance through his employer. They were also advised to immediately apply for Medicaid as her secondary insurance--but that wasn't approved until February 9th of this year. During that period of "waiting" for approval, Rachel and Josh were charged over \$60,000 in co-pays for out-of-pocket medical expenses--necessary things like

medication, therapy, equipment, and hospital stays. And Medicaid doesn't pay retroactively, so those bills belong to the family.

They are still waiting for Medicaid to approve Rachel, Cassie's mother, as her full time paid caregiver. Rachel has cut her work hours by 80% in order to care for Cassie--she requires someone to be at her side 24/7. They've now been waiting almost six months for Rachel to be approved as caregiver. It's a process she describes as "confusing, disjointed, and demoralizing." She told me it was already a long, frustrating road, but with shifts brought on in the Trump administration, processes have slowed even more or are in limbo.

Rachel and Josh agreed for me to share their story told because they know the value of folks hearing specific examples of how policies play out in the real world. In this case, they are two young parents struggling to do the best they can for their daughter in the remaining months of her short life. And they are having to fight--truly fight--to make sure little Cassie has the necessary comfort and care she needs. This is why we need Medicaid. This is why we stand here today to fight to make sure Medicaid supports all Americans when we face the unimaginable.

Together, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid form the cornerstone of a just society--one where we don't let the most vulnerable fall through the cracks. We will not let corporate interests or political agendas strip away the security we've earned. These programs aren't optional. They are essential. And they are non-negotiable.

So what do we do now? We keep fighting. We raise our voices. We demand that our elected officials protect and expand Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. We are the ones who've paid into these systems. We are the ones who will benefit from them. And we are the ones who will fight to keep them safe for generations to come. Hands Off Social Security! Hands Off Medicare! Hands Off Medicaid!

Thank you.

