Patients First Act offers important but uncertain opportunity to help Georgia’s uninsured

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(ATLANTA) – Gov. Brian Kemp took a potentially historic step today to help more Georgians access health insurance by enacting the Patients First Act, but the legislation provides no guarantee to expand insurance coverage or meaningfully address Georgia’s growing health care crisis. The Cover Georgia coalition has long highlighted the opportunity available to state lawmakers to put a health insurance card in the pockets of more Georgians by expanding Medicaid eligibility through the Affordable Care Act. The Patients First Act, Senate Bill (SB) 106, begins to seize this opportunity by authorizing the Kemp administration to develop federal waivers that could extend health coverage to more Georgians.

While the Patients First Act provides no details on how waivers will be structured or how many Georgians will gain coverage, Rep. Trey Kelley (R – Cedartown) stated earlier this week that “Senate Bill 106 will provide health care access and coverage to 250,000 Georgians.”

“Georgians want assurances that their state leaders will create a pathway to quality, affordable health coverage for everyone in the state,” said Georgians for a Healthy Future Executive Director Laura Colbert. “Unfortunately, SB 106 provides no information as to who will gain coverage, what changes might be made to Medicaid and private insurance, how much it will cost Georgia tax payers, or how it will impact the health and finances of Georgia families.”

Cover Georgia recognizes the tremendous but uncertain opportunity provided by the Patients First Act to help more Georgians access affordable health insurance and care. As the Kemp administration develops waivers, Cover Georgia looks forward to helping ensure two important goals are met:

- Provide health coverage to 240,000 uninsured Georgians below the federal poverty level
- Develop state support to ensure Georgians just above the poverty line are not left with gaps in their coverage due to high deductibles and costly co-pays

"If state leaders expand health coverage to 240,000 Georgians and help others just above the poverty line afford quality care, the Patients First Act could significantly improve Georgia’s health care landscape by reducing the state’s high uninsured rate and bringing more financial support for safety-net and rural hospitals,” said Georgia Budget and Policy Institute Policy Analyst Laura Harker.

Cover Georgia encourages state leaders to leverage this historic opening to expand health coverage. We will work to inform this process to craft the best waivers possible and continue advancing solutions that help all Georgians access the care they need.

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**About Cover Georgia:** Cover Georgia is a broad coalition of community stakeholders and advocates from across the state working to ensure that all Georgians regardless of income get the health coverage and care they need. The coalition strives to expand our state’s Medicaid program to cover low-income Georgians as envisioned by the Affordable Care Act. Health care is critically important to the health of Georgia’s families, communities, and economy. We believe we should work together to expand access to health care for all Georgians, especially those who can least afford it.