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Good morning Senator Brown. I am honored to be able to speak with you this morning here in Chillicothe.

My family lives in Albany, a small village in the west corner of Athens County. We are one of the 8900 families in Athens County that do not have access to healthcare coverage. My daughter, with Down Syndrome, does not qualify for Healthy Start, and as a family we are unable to purchase private coverage due to several preexisting conditions.

If I speak this morning about my family's access to care, I have to speak first about my daughter Emily. She needs intensive speech, physical and occupational therapies to help her reach her best potential. When I looked for these facilities in the Athens area, I found only Ohio University for physical therapy and speech, and there the therapists are grad students who change every three months with their school schedules.

This was not the answer for Emily, and she still needed occupational therapy for her fine motor skills, like being able to hold a pencil, and turn the page of a book. As a family, my husband and I looked into Nationwide Children's Hospital therapy services in Columbus.

While a long way from home, we knew that this was the best place to have her get the start she needed towards reaching her best potential. We signed her up for therapy, taking on the out of pocket expenses of each therapy, but also the total costs of getting there and being there for the day. There was 77 miles of travel one way, with gas at astronomical rates.

We sold our van and got a compact car to try and fight these costs. I tried to pack a lunch for us, since the costs of eating out while we were there were also hurting our budget. My daughter has particular eating issues; so packing food became too difficult as she grew. All in all, the trips each week would cost us over \$500 when all therapies, food and gas were added together.

I consider my family one of the lucky ones, since we had the gas money to get where we needed to be for Emily, and were able to essentially run a tab of therapy bills at Children's Hospital. We kept this up for over 2 years, until school age therapy services were able to kick in.

We also were able to take her to Nationwide Children's Hospital for developmental disability clinic, where an issue with her eyes was caught, a blood test to rule out thyroid disease was completed, as well as a need for orthotic shoe inserts was

found. This essentially is a “one stop shop” for services for children like Emily. While there are clinics in local health departments, there are no areas to have all of the tests ran that day on the spot.

My daughter is not the only one who has had issues accessing the care she needs in her own back yard. My husband has a history of severe kidney stones. When he had an attack this July, I chose to drive him 35 miles to Adena medical center, when he was working right around the corner from an emergency clinic.

Why would I choose to do so? I couldn't imagine the bill that would come to an uninsured person from a for profit clinic who has no program to assist financially when you have no insurance. I ran a huge risk of my husband passing out or of having something more serious happen to his kidneys, but I knew that as a family we could not take on a bill of several thousands of dollars and be expected to pay it within 30 days, as had happened to us in the past.

Senator Brown, I am not the only family that lives in Southeast Ohio that has trouble accessing healthcare and healthcare specialists. I live in an area where two adjacent counties, Meigs and Vinton, do not have an emergency room within 25 miles. Meigs County does not have 911 services. The vast amount of these counties are remote areas, where most folks do not have the most basic of services, let alone the gas money or the proper transportation to get to that life saving clinic.

Yet another health care issue that hits Southeast Ohio hard is access to dental care. There are very few dentists in the local area. Athens has dentists, but some won't take Medicaid, some won't take uninsured without full payment, and there are no pediatric dentists at all. Again, you have to head north towards Columbus for that service.

This is a healthcare issue that can reach well beyond oral health. When there are oral health issues, sometimes there is missed work or school; there can be systemic infections, and many other more serious complications. All that aside, it is always harder to move forward with a job interview or with a school presentation if you are missing teeth or are experiencing extreme halitosis.

On a personal note, I am worried that Emily needs to see a dentist now that she is almost 4 years old, but don't think I can take her to another specialist outside of Athens. I am worried that she may have dental health issues that I am not taking care of.

When we talk about access to services, there are so many more things to consider than the immediate health of the children and the adults in my hometown areas. If Emily does not get speech therapy this week, it won't hurt her immediately, what it will do, however, is potentially slow down her growth in her ability to speak. Not having adequate occupational therapy will not harm her immediately either, but

eventually inability to stick a sticker on her shirt, stack blocks or color with a skinny marker may turn out to be something that stops her from reaching her potential.

Simple skills like this are building blocks for life skills she would use everyday for the rest of her life. She needs these skills so that can speak intelligibly enough to be able to ask for what she wants, write her name, turn the page of a book, punch the buttons on a calculator to balance a checkbook, or to even hold down a good job. All these services are connected to her future. Many other families are also experiencing the same, yet are unable to reach the services they and their children need.

I work everyday to find and talk to families like mine who are having issues accessing healthcare. I assure you, Senator Brown, that my family is not unique. I get calls almost everyday from folks much worse off than my family that are trying to figure out what they can do to get their family the care they need without the ability to travel outside the area. I have made this work my life passion-- to listen to, advocate for, and try to direct to the right people these families that are in crisis with their health. I am sure that it is reassuring to talk to someone like me who also lives these issues everyday, but we need to do more than talk. We need to find a solution to the access and cost issues in this great part of Ohio.

As a family, we make hard choices every day about our healthcare, and we provide everything we can for our daughter and for each other, since we know that healthy parents raise a healthy child.

What we need is a government and a president on our side to help us. We are willing to put into the system what we can, what we need is the door to be open to make sure healthcare is affordable, achievable and accessible for not only my family but so many thousands just like us.