

County sets a low threshold for help with indigent care

by JOE COMPIAN | Posted: Thursday, June 27, 2013 12:00 am

By a vote of 4-1, the Galveston County commissioners, on a motion by Commissioner Kevin Clark of League City, lowered the income eligibility level for the county's medically indigent program from 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level — FPL — to 35 percent of FPL.

In the future, in order to access Galveston County's medically indigent program, a single individual's income must not exceed \$4,021.50.

According to the commissioners, 60 percent of the current indigent program participants are at 21 percent or below of the FPL, with the remaining 40 percent above this level.

Participants in the county's medically indigent program are uninsured individuals younger than the age of 65 with chronic conditions requiring specialty care. Their benefits are capped at \$30,000 per fiscal year.

The vote, while disappointing, was not unexpected. It reflects the continued challenge of providing assistance to a population with few health care options.

With the governor's refusal to expand Medicaid using federal dollars, Galveston County taxpayers will continue to incur this cost. An expanded Medicare program in Texas would have covered many of these individuals and removed them from the county's indigent program.

In asking the commissioners to defer this action item for one month, or alternatively, vote against the lower eligibility level, I urged the commissioners to be as innovative as other states have been in accepting the federal dollars. Galveston County has a unique opportunity working with the faith-based community and other advocates in arriving at a solution that will save dollars and provide health care to the least among us.

I urged the commissioners to look at other state models where program dollars are used to purchase a health insurance policy for program participants at a cost significantly below the \$30,000 per person annual cost.

The Galveston County commissioners responded that they were willing to work with Gulf Coast Interfaith to take a new look at other models; however, increased cost necessitated immediately action before a \$7.5 million reserve was depleted.