



## Lawmakers to hold hearings on Medicaid

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Alabama lawmakers plan to hold a series of hearings on the state's Medicaid program as the agency's commissioner predicts dramatic service cuts without additional funding.

The House and Senate general fund budget committee have scheduled the first joint meeting Wednesday to discuss funding for the health care program that covers approximately a million Alabamians.

Senate Finance and Taxation Committee Chairman Trip Pittman said the meetings are intended to help lawmakers and the public gain a better understanding of the complicated Medicaid structure. Lawmakers, he said, also plan to ask tough questions about the program's operations and sustainability.

"I think there are legislators who need to more fully understand the workings of Medicaid," Pittman said.

Lawmakers earlier this year overrode Gov. Robert Bentley's veto to enact a budget that will steer \$700 million to Medicaid next fiscal year. Bentley said \$785 million is needed to maintain services in the program.

Pittman said the first meeting will be Medicaid "making their case" why the \$785 million is needed.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard said last week that he didn't know where the additional funds for Medicaid would come from.

"We've funded Medicaid at the expense of everything else. We can't do pay raises for state employees. I think we're just to the point, it's probably a healthy thing for them to look, 'OK, here's the money we have. Let's figure out to live within it," Hubbard said.

Earlier this month, Bentley and Medicaid Commissioner Stephanie Azar laid out potential Medicaid cuts without additional funds, including harsh options such as eliminating prescription drug coverage for adults or requiring patients to go to one big box pharmacy chain through a preferred provider program.

"There are going to be people suffering because of what we have to do to implement some of these cuts," Bentley said at the April news conference.

Pittman said the hearings will stretch out over several weeks.