

# Commission on Human Rights

## **Kentucky Governor Beshear receives first Beacon of Light Award for leadership in providing healthcare**

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Louisville, Kentucky (Oct. 17, 2014) –Today, from Louisville, Ky., where the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights has headquarters, Executive Director John J. Johnson spoke about the commission’s first-ever “Beacon of Light Award” and the selection of Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear as recipient.

“Governor Beshear was chosen to receive the honor for his determination and leadership in implementing the U.S. Affordable Care Act in Kentucky,” Johnson said. “There can be no greater fundamental human right than the right to quality and affordable healthcare,” he said.

The award was presented yesterday, although the governor was unable to attend, at the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame inductions held in Bowling Green, Ky.

According to a Gallup poll released in August, since implementing the Affordable Care Act, Kentucky’s percentage of uninsured has dropped to the second-lowest in the nation. As of July, over 520,000 Kentuckians enrolled in healthcare insurance through the state affordable healthcare website, with three-quarters of the newly insured enrolled in Medicaid.

The number of uninsured in the state dropped from over 20 percent in 2013 to about 12 percent as of July 2014, reflecting an eight-and-a-half percent decline since the federal Affordable Care Act took effect, according to a report by Western Kentucky University Public Radio.

“The proof is in the pudding,” Johnson said.

“The Affordable Care Act was not well received in Kentucky by either the public or many elected officials, and the governor confronted political opposition from friend and foe alike,” Johnson said. “In spite of this, he recognized the great potential of the program to help his state,” he said.

The following was read by the commission at the award presentation:

“On Feb. 21, 2013, after years of difficult and hard fought struggles, Governor Steve Beshear overcame overwhelming obstacles by pushing through and signing legislation adopting the U.S. Affordable Care Act. At the time, Kentucky became the only southern state to fully adopt the Act by expanding Medicaid and operating a state-run health insurance exchange program administered through a highly effective website known as Kentucky Connect (Kynect), which has become a national model of efficiency.

“In a state where the residents’ collective health has long been horrendous, ranking among the worst in almost every health category, more than 640,000 Kentucky citizens, nearly one in six, were previously uninsured.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Kentucky has the highest-in-the-nation lung cancer death rate for women. However, Kentucky previously ranked 30<sup>th</sup> for women without health insurance – including 17 percent of the state’s white women, over 25 percent of the state’s African American women, and almost 48 percent of the state’s Hispanic women.

“Armed with these disturbing facts,” Johnson said, today, “the governor set aside his political self-interests to serve the citizens, saying, ‘Frankly, we can’t implement the Affordable Care Act fast enough.’”

The “Beacon of Light Award” says, “On behalf of the half-million formerly uninsured citizens and a grateful state, the Kentucky Commission on Human rights present this award to Governor Steve Beshear for his courageous and tireless efforts to provide affordable and quality healthcare to all citizens.”

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government agency that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, and through its affiliations with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, the state commission enforces the U.S. Civil Rights Act. These laws make discrimination illegal.

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