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### **Lusby student to march for health care reform Saturday** *By SARA NEWMAN*

*Staff writer*

When Brandon Johnson of Lusby joined Healthcare is a Human Right — Maryland, the College of Southern Maryland student didn't know how close to home the issue was for his family.

From the time Johnson was 13, he and his family have gone through a series of emergency room, doctors and hospital visits. Johnson broke his arm and suffered from various allergic reactions, and his stepmother had a baby, among other instances. Though his parents had health insurance — Johnson's father works for the United States Postal Service, and his stepmother works for the Census Bureau — it was not enough to cover all of their medical expenses, and Johnson's parents had to file for bankruptcy.

After he became involved with the movement, Johnson's parents told him and his brother, Cory, about their financial situation, which gave the brothers even more incentive to make a difference.

"We wanted to do everything we could to spread awareness and get them to see they're not alone in this," Johnson, now 20, said.

On Saturday, hundreds of Marylanders from across the state will join in Baltimore to call for health care reform, demanding it as a basic human right.

The march is being organized by the Healthcare Is a Human Right — Maryland campaign, which was launched last year to build a movement to achieve universal, publicly financed health care in Maryland. Local chapters have been founded in seven counties, including Calvert.

Members have carried out more than a thousand health care surveys and held health care speak-outs throughout the state. People across the state are sharing their stories of medical bankruptcy, being denied urgent care and losing their homes due to medical debt, despite having "good" health insurance, Michael Fox, a leader in the campaign, wrote in a press release about the march.

"We hope that people use this march to show there is a movement growing in this state that is rooted in putting people first," Fox said. "We're doing it to show strength and saying [the Affordable Care Act] will not be enough or solve the problem and we need a system to put people first."

The statewide campaign for universal health care began last December and has since gained traction in several counties where local chapters have been initiated, including Frederick, Howard, Baltimore, Montgomery, Calvert and Carroll counties. A universal health care system would create a single-payer, publicly financed, privately delivered system that covers all Marylanders, eliminating co-pays, deductibles and insurance hassles, according to Healthcare-Now of Maryland.

In 2011, Vermont was the first state to adopt a universal health care system after the Vermont Workers' Center launched the grassroots Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign in 2008 in the state. Citizens in Maryland, California, Oregon, New York and Maine are using strategies from Vermont's campaign, according to the HCHR Vermont website.

"Though clearly better than nothing, the Affordable Care Act will only maintain the tiered system that provides better access to care for people who have more money," Fox states in the release, adding, "There will still be more than 436,000 Maryland residents without health care."

In 2012, there were 802,000 uninsured Maryland residents, accounting for 13.8 percent of the total population, according to a presentation made by the Calvert County chapter in July. In addition, HCHR-Maryland claims the U.S. spends more money on health care than any other country, and its system is less effective. A universal health care system could save the country more than \$570 billion annually if implemented nationally, according to the presentation.

"The march is important because it's a sign for those who have similar stories to mine and those who have been through worse than I have," Johnson said. "We're fed up with the way things are going, and we're trying to make a presence and stand up for ourselves."

The rally will begin at 2:30 p.m. at Creative Alliance (3134 Eastern Ave.), with speakers from across Maryland who have been affected by the health care crisis, according to the release.

Staff writer Amanda Scott contributed to this report.

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