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Paralyzed player's insurance runs out

ROBBINS | Mom pleads for help as coverage is capped at \$5M for son hurt on gridiron in 2000

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We've paid \$5 million -- and now you're on your own.

That's the message Rasul "Rocky" Clark, the Eisenhower High School running back paralyzed from the neck down on the field in 2000, recently received from the insurance company paying his medical bills.

On Friday, Clark's mother, Annette Clark, pleaded with school district officials, Gov. Quinn and anyone who can help to restore her son's medical insurance.

"He's very much alive, and that's the way I want to keep him," she said. "He's my inspiration. He's my everything here. ... My son wants to continue to get 24-hour care and the best medicine, best medical supplies there is."

The unemployed single mother from Robbins is her son's sole care provider.

Since August, she said, they've already racked up \$70,000 in unpaid medical bills for everything from hospital stays and expensive prescriptions to oxygen tanks and breathing treatments that help Rocky's only working lung.

Annette Clark, who sleeps at the foot of her son's bed at night, fears that the mounting bills might force her son into a nursing home -- or an early grave.

"I want him here with me as long as God let him be," she said.

In mid-August, the Clarks received word from the school district's catastrophic injury insurance provider that they had reached the \$5 million cap after 10 years of coverage.

"After that, things went downhill on us trying to survive on a day-to-day basis. It's really hard on us now," Annette Clark said.

Community High School District 218 Supt. John Byrne said the school board has instructed him to do "anything and everything" to help the Clark family.

So far, Byrne said, the insurance provider that held Clark's policy is reviewing their coverage and that there might be some money still available for Clark's bills.

"We imagine it's not a lot, but we hope it will bridge the gap," Byrne said. "We know Rocky has full disability insurance through Social Security and Medicare. ... We've been told by the state that Rocky would qualify for ... the Illinois Child Health Insurance Program because the injury happened when he was a child."

Byrne said the district will help the Clarks fill out the paperwork for the I-CHIP program, and he also is looking into how the new national health-care law, which eliminated caps on insurance coverage, might affect Clark.

"It seems Rocky would be a poster boy for that," Byrne said.

Annette Clark called the school district's support "a blessing."

Rocky Clark, 26, lay motionless in a hospital bed under a white blanket in his bedroom, which is decorated with varsity letters, track ribbons and pencil drawings from his high school days.

"I'm still fighting the good fight," he said.

Rocky, 26, has suffered serious health setbacks in recent months, including the collapse of his only good lung. At one point, his condition was so dire that his mother signed a do-not-resuscitate order.

But Rocky pulled through. Now, he hopes to recover and get back to volunteering as a running-backs coach for the Eisenhower football team, where he has been helping out since 2007.

"I love being with the guys," Rocky said. "I inspire them, and they inspire me."

As for his medical insurance coverage, Rocky's leaving that one to the Lord.

"I'm a little worried, but if there's a will, there's a way," he said. "God is in control of it all."

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