

December ____, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader of the United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for Menendez amendment to provide states with the option to remove the five-year waiting period for legal immigrants in Medicaid

Dear Majority Leader Reid,

Thank you for your leadership in advancing health care reform this year. We, the undersigned organizations, write in support of Senator Menendez's amendment to the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act," co-sponsored by Senators Durbin, Rockefeller and Bingaman. The amendment would give states the option to remove the five-year waiting period for legal immigrants to obtain Medicaid. Allowing states to extend Medicaid coverage to low-income, legal immigrants will save lives and meet the President's health reform goals of expanding coverage and controlling costs.

Immigrants contribute to this nation's workforce, pay their fair share of taxes, and pursue citizenship to its fullest potential. Yet, under existing law, many low-income legal immigrants must wait five years to obtain Medicaid coverage. The five-year waiting period prevents individuals from obtaining necessary services to prevent serious medical conditions from worsening. This type of restriction is also unfair and excludes immigrants from a critical safety net that their taxes help support. Providing states with the option to lift the bar helps ensure that legal immigrants have access to timely treatment and avoid more expensive emergency room care. It will also help promote a stronger national workforce and less reliance on emergency room visits, the costs of which would be shifted to all consumers.

The majority of Americans support eliminating the five-year waiting period for legal immigrants, and when Congress passed the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009, it voted overwhelmingly to provide states the option to end Medicaid barriers for lawfully residing children and pregnant women. The Senate should finish the job and allow states to extend Medicaid to all otherwise eligible immigrants.

Providing Medicaid coverage, rather than subsidies, would also save costs for the government. Extending Medicaid coverage would provide this vulnerable population access to preventive and critical health care services that may not be available to low-income legal immigrants if they were to purchase an insurance plan offered through the Exchange.

As the Senate continues its debate on health care reform legislation, we urge you to work with President Obama to include Senator Menendez's amendment into the final bill to restore equity for low-income legal immigrants. We stand ready to join you to push for enactment of such reform this year.

Sincerely,

[List in formation]

cc: The Honorable Robert Menendez
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
The Honorable John D. Rockefeller
The Honorable Jeff Bingaman