



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

Barbara B. Kennelly, Chair

November 5, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader Boehner:

On behalf of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO), a coalition of national not-for-profit organizations representing nearly 60 million older Americans, we urge you to pass extensions of the Qualified Individual program and the therapy caps exception process – two crucial policies for Medicare beneficiaries – before the 111th Congress concludes.

As you are aware, the Qualified Individual (QI) program allows state Medicaid programs to pay Medicare Part B premiums for individuals with incomes between 120 and 135 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$13,000 to \$14,600 in 2010) who are not otherwise eligible for Medicaid. Receipt of the QI benefit also automatically enrolls the individual in the Medicare Part D low-income subsidy (LIS or Extra Help). The QI program is funded through a federal block grant whereby the states receive 100% federal money to cover the costs of this benefit.

It would be best to make this program permanent. The program has been very unstable, with extensions made for short periods – and at the last minute – just as it has been scheduled to expire. Such instability has created havoc and uncertainty in the lives of those low-income seniors and people with disabilities who rely on the benefit, and it runs counter to Medicare's goal of providing health security to those in greatest need. This instability also adversely affects states, which must administer this program in an atmosphere of uncertainty.

This assistance is particularly important as the nation emerges from severe recession and, at minimum, must be extended. Unless Congress passes an extension by the end of the year, this vital program will end. If the QI program were to expire, the loss of this benefit would leave

beneficiaries with significant, unaffordable out-of-pocket costs. Many would likely have no choice but to drop their Part B coverage.

The exceptions process that applies to Medicare coverage limitations on outpatient physical, speech, and occupational therapy will also expire on December 31st if Congress fails to act. Medicare beneficiaries may currently obtain coverage for medically necessary therapy services that exceed payment caps by seeking an exception. Treatment limitations include a \$1,860 combined cap for speech and physical therapy services and a separate \$1,860 total for occupational therapy. Extending the exceptions process will help ensure that Medicare beneficiaries can continue to access these services that restore and maintain the capacities needed for daily living.

We appreciate your ongoing work to ensure that these priorities are addressed for older adults as you conclude Congress's work for this session.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFSCME Retirees
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alzheimer's Association
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Society on Aging
Association of Jewish Aging Services
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Easter Seals
Families USA
Gray Panthers
The Jewish Federations of North America
Lutheran Services in America
Medicare Rights Center
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Association for Home Care & Hospice
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council on Aging
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National Senior Citizens law Center

OWL - The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
PHI – Quality Care Through Quality Jobs
Service Employees International Union
Wider Opportunities for Women

CC Members of the United States Senate
 Members of the United States House of Representatives