



June 23, 2009

Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, HELP Committee
317 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Mike Enzi
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
379A Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Max Baucus
Chairman, Finance Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member, Finance Committee
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Kennedy, Baucus, Enzi, and Grassley:

I am delighted that you are crafting health care reform bills that will provide coverage to a large share of the American population. On behalf of the HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York, I commend you for your leadership in this area and also want to call your attention to several basic health care reform principles that are crucial to the health and well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the United States.

The HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York is a federally mandated community planning body charged with allocating and distributing approximately \$100 million dollars from the Health Resources and Services Administration for treatment and care for PLWHA. Members of the Planning Council include physicians, service providers, advocates, and PLWHA, all of whom are aware of the critical importance of medical and social support services funded by Ryan White and all of whom are strongly committed to affordable, comprehensive, and quality health care for PLWHA and for all Americans. Planning Council members are particularly eager to see the following principles incorporated into the final health care reform bill:

- All individuals in the United States should have the option of selecting a public plan. Competition for patients with a government run plan will a) force private insurance companies to provide generous, readily-accessible health care benefits for all and b) minimize private insurance companies' motivation to withhold or deny care.
- All uninsured individuals with income below \$20,000 per year and families of four with income below \$42,000 per year should be eligible for Medicaid. States should provide Medicaid coverage for PLWHA with even higher income, as proposed in the Early Treatment for HIV Act (ETHA). Individuals whose care is covered will be able to remain in the work force and pay taxes rather than progressing to disability and unemployment.
- Medicaid benefits should be comprehensive and standardized throughout all fifty states.
- Out-of-pocket costs for Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries should be minimized.
- The federal contribution to state Medicaid programs should be enhanced during economic crises.
- HIV counseling and testing should be universally available, and Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance companies should cover the cost.
- The two-year Medicare waiting period for people with disabilities should be eliminated in order to improve access to health care.
- Medicare beneficiaries should not have to face "donut hole" gaps in coverage.
- Incentives to strengthen the health care workforce and, in particular, to increase the number of primary care providers and to ensure adequate and timely reimbursement to providers should be provided.
- Private health insurance options should be expanded, and everyone should have access to an affordable, comprehensive, quality health insurance plan.
- Ryan White Programs should be supported and strengthened so that they continue to provide critical health and support services to PLWHA.

We realize that these requests are not inexpensive, but we believe that they will result in cost-savings down the road. PLWHA (and members of the American population as a whole) who have access to these benefits will lead longer, healthier, and more productive lives. With greater access to care, they will not wait for health conditions to become grave and more expensive to treat but will, rather, take steps early on to protect themselves and, ultimately, their communities.

Thank you very much for your work on health care reform. The country will be deeply grateful to you if meaningful reform is enacted.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Soraya Elcock". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Soraya Elcock
Community Co-Chair