CONGRESSWOMAN
CHELLIE PINGREE

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

1ST DISTRICT
MAINE

July 7, 2009

Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Charles B. Rangel
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Waxman, Rangel and Miller:

Thank you for your efforts to draft a health care reform plan that ensures quality, affordable health coverage for all Americans. Health care reform is extremely complex and we appreciate the weight of the task before you.

We write today out of concern for the millions of low to moderate income Americans who struggle to afford coverage. In this country, approximately 80% of the uninsured have incomes below 300% of the Federal poverty level ($32,000 for an individual or $66,000 for a family of four). These households often cannot afford to purchase health care on their own, and those who do purchase private coverage often find themselves underinsured or unable to cover the cost of their deductibles or other out of pocket expenses. These people frequently forgo needed health care, end up sicker, and ultimately are forced to seek care through our hospital emergency rooms.

It is critical that the health care system we, as Members of Congress, work to establish is one that is truly accessible and affordable for all Americans. We offer the following recommendations to ensure that we create such a system.

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A final proposal for health care reform should:

- **Build on the Medicaid and CHIP programs that are designed to meet the needs of low-income Americans, including many in poor health.** A final package must recognize the unique role of the Medicaid program and CHIP in providing comprehensive affordable coverage to low income families, people with disabilities and the elderly. Medicaid and CHIP must be strengthened so that these programs can serve as a solid base of coverage for low-income populations. We recommend that eligibility for Medicaid be expanded to cover more populations, including adults without children, allowing states to cover people through Medicaid at incomes above any minimum standard that is set. Health coverage for eligible populations should be provided directly through the Medicaid program to ensure straightforward and efficient delivery of care to low-income populations.

- **Provide stable and adequate funding to help states pay for coverage in the Medicaid program, especially during bad economic times.** All states will need additional assistance to pay for coverage through Medicaid. Those that are expanding coverage will need help with covering new populations. States that have led the nation in expanding Medicaid to cover their uninsured should also receive additional assistance to maintain coverage. It is particularly important that Congress establish a trigger to immediately increase federal financing for states during a recession. As we all know, demand for the Medicaid program increases as our economy sours and states often find themselves unable to pay for this.

- **Ensure access to health care coverage by establishing standards protecting people with low to moderate incomes who are not eligible for Medicaid from high cost sharing.** Deep premium subsidies to help low to moderate income households purchase insurance through a health care exchange will be critical. However, these households should be protected from other cost sharing to ensure that they can afford both coverage and services. We recommend that reasonable limits on cost sharing be tied to family incomes so that individuals do not go without needed care.

- **Ensure access to comprehensive packages of essential benefits for people purchasing coverage through an exchange.** Health care coverage is not affordable for people with low to moderate incomes unless they have access to comprehensive benefits. Excluding services that people need from health care plans has the same effect as setting unreasonable premiums.

This is an exciting time. We have the opportunity to finally establish a health care system that ensures that everyone can get the health care they need and deserve. We look forward to working with you over the next couple of months to reach this critical goal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

Paul Hodes
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

John W. Olver
Member of Congress

David Wu
Member of Congress

Dale E. Kildee
Member of Congress

Michael H. Michaud
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Nancy H. Pelosi, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Steny A. Hoyer, Majority Leader
The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce
The Honorable Dave Camp, Ranking Member of the Committee on House Ways and Means
The Honorable John Kline, Ranking Member of the Committee on Education and Labor