

CQMC Coalition for Quality Maternity Care

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November 7, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
129 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Representative Hensarling:

On behalf of the Coalition for Quality Maternity Care (CQMC), a coalition of national professional, consumer, and human rights organizations that promote high quality maternity care for all women and newborns, we urge the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to ensure access to maternal health services provided through the Medicaid program is not jeopardized by efforts to reduce the deficit.

Today fully ten percent of all women in the United States count on the Medicaid program to provide for their health care needs annually. Medicaid finances at least four in ten of all births nationally and provides women access to vital prenatal care services. Proposals that would turn the Medicaid program into a block grant to the states would place women's maternal health needs in jeopardy by limiting federal spending for Medicaid to preset amounts. The preset levels of funding would not be responsive to program needs. Under a block grant, coverage would not be guaranteed and financing would only be available up to the state's allotment for the year. Analysis by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is that large reductions to the federal portion of Medicaid spending envisioned by the block grant proposal would probably require states to reduce payments to providers, curtail eligibility for Medicaid, reduce coverage of services to beneficiaries, and/or require higher out of pocket spending by beneficiaries. We must do better for women and newborns. The coalition urges you to oppose efforts to block grant the Medicaid program.

In the area of maternal health, opportunity exists to improve the Medicaid program while reducing costs. CQMC believes there is waste and inefficiency in the delivery of maternal health services to women in the United States, including within the Medicaid program. The cesarean birth rate is at a record high of 32.9 percent of all births in 2008, resulting in complications for women and their newborns and higher costs. The maternal mortality ratio in the United States, which was declining until the mid-1980s, is now significantly higher than for nearly all European countries. The state of health of childbearing women and their newborns is considered a



key indication of a society's health and the effectiveness of its health care system. Unfortunately, many maternal and newborn health indicators are declining rather than improving. The current quality shortfalls place all childbearing women and their newborns at risk, and unnecessarily add to the fiscal challenges for our health care system. While the U.S. spends far more on maternal and newborn care than other industrialized nations, the United States ranks behind 49 other countries on key maternal and newborn health indicators.

The time is now to improve the quality of maternity care in the U.S. To this end, the CQMC is working to establish national strategies to ensure access to affordable, high quality maternity care for all women and infants. It seeks to achieve this goal by removing barriers to optimal maternal health practice, promoting models of care that are evidence-based, improving maternity care choices for women, and reducing disparities in maternal and newborn health outcomes.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss needed reforms in the delivery of maternal health services in the United States. To learn more about the CQMC or to set up a meeting, please contact Patrick Cooney at (202) 347-0034.

Sincerely,

**American Association of Birth Centers
American College of Nurse-Midwives
Amnesty International USA
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Black Women's Health Imperative
Childbirth Connection
International Center for Traditional Childbearing
Midwives Alliance of North America
National Association of Certified Professional Midwives**

cc: Members, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
The Hon. John Boehner, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Hon. Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Hon. Harry Reid, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Hon. Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate