

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

September 15, 2009

Mr. President,

As advocates for women of all ages, we commend you for your strong leadership on health care and thank you for helping to refocus the effort in your Joint Address to Congress last week. Your leadership is critical to ensuring that comprehensive health care reform legislation will be signed into law this year.

Along with discrimination based on pre-existing conditions and health status, gender and age discrimination must be eliminated in health care. As recently as July 28, 2009, you called for an end to discrimination in health insurance. Such a statement was noticeably absent from your address to Congress, and we hope this is not an indication of a departure from your previous commitment to eliminate discrimination, and that it does not signal a willingness to compromise, resulting in discrimination being written into this important federal legislation.

We appreciate your support for a public health insurance option for those who choose it. It is important to the women and families we represent that if the health insurance they have is not working for them, they will have another choice, and if they have no insurance, an affordable option with good coverage is coming via the public option. We continue to support the robust public option that was reported out of the House Committees on Ways and Means and Education and Labor and the Senate HELP Committee.

Mr. President, the need for reform is urgent. Women are struggling to maintain appropriate health care for themselves and their families, and many women over 40 find they cannot find any affordable coverage, even high-deductible plans with coverage riders. As unemployment rises, many families are losing employer-sponsored coverage, and without the income from jobs lost, they cannot afford COBRA coverage. Further, women often work in hourly wage and part-time positions and earn less than their male counterparts, leaving them less savings to rely on in hard times. We must have health care reform that will effectively bring down costs and significantly expand access, eliminate disparities in care, and end discrimination based on age and gender in health insurance.

We recognize that there is much to be gained through reform, and we continue to support efforts to bring this change to fruition. Current proposals would expand affordable coverage through subsidies, eliminate gender discrimination in the individual insurance market, and ensure comprehensive coverage for women's health. We hope Congress, with your leadership, will demand true community rating, refusing to accept gender and age discrimination through rating practices. These components, along with a robust public option, will deliver true change to the millions of American women and families who need better health care options.

We look forward to working with you to bring true health care reform to women and families across the country. Please consider us allies in this effort, and call on us where we may be of assistance.

Sincerely,

American College of Nurse-Midwives
Business and Women's Professional Foundation
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Maryland Women's Coalition for Health Care Reform
MOTHERS Initiative
Ms. Foundation for Women
National Association of Mothers' Centers
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO)
National Organization for Women (NOW)
National Women's Health Network
OWL – The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
PHI-Health Care for Health Care Workers
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
Turning Anger into Change
U.S. Positive Women's Network
Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease (WORLD)
Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI)
Women Together For Change
YWCA USA