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www.kyvoicesforhealth.org

March 21, 2017

Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McConnell:

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of faith leaders, economists, healthcare providers, civil rights organizations, health advocates, and concerned Kentuckians working to reduce poverty, support working families and improve health outcomes in our Commonwealth. We join together in strongly urging you to **oppose the American Health Care Act, as well as any other Senate proposal that ends the Medicaid expansion, caps and cuts Medicaid funding for states, or reduces coverage for millions of Americans.** We ask you to stand firm in protecting both the Medicaid expansion and the underlying Medicaid program, by opposing proposals that phase out expansion over time or convert Medicaid to a “per capita cap” that shifts costs and risk to states. These changes would have drastic consequences for the neediest Kentuckians because they would force Kentucky to ration coverage and care.

If the House passes the American Health Care Act and the Senate takes up the legislation directly, your voice will be critical to ensuring the future of the Medicaid program and the health of your constituents. We ask you to speak out to express your concern about how these proposals would negatively affect Kentucky.

We are concerned that the American Health Care Act effectively ends the Medicaid expansion by changing the federal financing over time to a level that would make it impossible for our Commonwealth to maintain. Currently, the federal government is paying 95 percent of the cost of the Medicaid expansion, and this percentage will phase down slightly in the coming years, but never dip below 90 percent. Yet, under the House bill, beginning in 2020 states would only receive their regular match rate of 70 percent to cover this group. A Commonwealth like ours that is struggling to stop a growing opioid epidemic, provide adequate funding for our public schools, create better job opportunities, and keep our pension system solvent, will not be able to continue the Medicaid expansion at this reduced federal match rate. Quite simply, lowering the expansion match rate would force our Commonwealth to eliminate health coverage for more than 500,000 Kentuckians, the majority of whom are working in low-income jobs, serving as caregivers, or attending school.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the American Health Care Act is the change from the current financing to imposing a per-capita cap in Medicaid, which would shift costs to states and ultimately put coverage for seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children at risk. The per-capita cap reduces the amount of federal funding that states could receive to cover beneficiaries relative to current law and prevents that amount

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from responding to any changes in the needs of beneficiaries or unanticipated costs, such as a crisis like our opioid epidemic, a potential Zika outbreak or the introduction of a new costly treatment. As these cuts grow over time, our Commonwealth would have to either make up the difference from its own budget – cutting areas like public education or public safety – or, more likely, ration care for Medicaid recipients by cutting coverage, services, or reimbursements to providers

This is the end of Medicaid as we know it, and we are counting on you to reject this harmful change.

We are also concerned that the Senate is moving to take up such monumentally important legislation with no hearings, no public input on the process, and fast-track procedures that allow for very limited debate. We urge you to work towards a more responsible, transparent, and careful approach to changing the Affordable Care Act.

A poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in December 2015 found that 72 percent – a clear majority of Kentuckians – wanted to keep Medicaid expansion as it was then with no changes.

The decisions you and your colleagues make on Medicaid in the weeks ahead will reverberate for years to come for the most vulnerable in our state who need the benefits of our strong Medicaid program. We ask again that you oppose the American Health Care Act or any other Senate proposal that ends Medicaid expansion, shifts costs to states by capping and cutting Medicaid funding, or reduces coverage for hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians.

As health advocates who strive to be a voice for vulnerable and underserved Kentuckians, it is our sincere hope that you will listen closely to the needs and concerns of your constituents as the healthcare debate moves forward. We stand ready to work collaboratively with you to find solutions that will truly move Kentucky's health, economy and quality of life forward.

Respectfully,

Kentucky Voices for Health
Advocacy Action Network
American Heart Association
Catholic Conference of Kentucky
Cumberland Family Medical Centers
Fairview Community Health Center
Family Health Centers
Friedell Committee
HealthFirst Bluegrass

Homeless & Housing Coalition of Kentucky
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy
Kentucky Council of Churches
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Kentucky Nurses Association
Kentucky Primary Care Association
White House Clinics