

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

As Members of the Senate Finance Committee with jurisdiction over Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), we have the responsibility and privilege of protecting the more than 70 million children, pregnant women, seniors, individuals living with disabilities, and low-income parents and working Americans who rely on Medicaid and CHIP for essential health coverage. We write to you today to express our deep concern regarding the ongoing actions taken by the Trump Administration in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services to undermine Medicaid and threaten the health care of millions of Americans.

In the run up to 2016, President Trump made numerous statements that he would not cut Medicaid.¹ Yet, as demonstrated by the Trump Administration's actions taken over the last three years, this Administration in coordination with your Department has taken every opportunity to try to gut Medicaid and put critical health coverage for millions of vulnerable Americans on the chopping block.

After failed legislative attempts to cap and cut Medicaid in 2017, the President continued to prioritize slashing this vital entitlement in his budgets.² Furthermore, late last month, the Department of Health and Human Services through its Centers for Medicare & Medicaid

¹ See, e.g., Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TWITTER (May 7, 2015, 11:38 AM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/596338364187602944>; Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TWITTER (May 7, 2015, 11:40 AM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/596338822373343233>; Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TWITTER (July 11, 2015, 4:23 AM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/619784061339439104>; Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TWITTER (Oct. 31, 2015, 12:30 AM), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/660312839543005184>.

² See, e.g., *Putting America's Health First, FY 2018 President's Budget for HHS*, DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. (May 23, 2017); *Putting America's Health First, FY 2019 President's Budget for HHS*, DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. (Feb. 12, 2018); *Putting America's Health First, FY 2020 President's Budget for HHS*, DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. (Mar. 11, 2019).

Services issued guidance³ to states encouraging them to apply for waivers to block grant and cap federal funding for large portions of their state Medicaid program. In return for placing arbitrary funding caps on its Medicaid program, the state would get unprecedented authority to cut benefits and access to care, including prescription drugs, and further restrict coverage by charging unaffordable premiums and cost sharing, and implementing arbitrary paperwork requirements. In addition to being illegal and against long-standing Congressional intent for the Medicaid program, such actions would have devastating consequences for vulnerable Americans across the country. Under the guidance, low-income individuals including, but not limited to, pregnant women and new mothers, individuals suffering with opioid and substance use disorders, Americans struggling with mental illness, veterans, individuals with chronic conditions like cancer, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia could all be subject to the destructive effects of arbitrary block grants and caps and cuts to benefits, coverage, and access. These disastrous consequences would be further exacerbated by increases to uncompensated care costs for health care providers including safety net hospitals and rural providers.

To make matters worse, this week, the Administration renewed its efforts to slash Medicaid and threaten the health care of millions more Americans by again proposing to slash Medicaid funding as part of the President's Budget.⁴ Such policies would lead to devastating cuts to Medicaid, jeopardizing affordable, comprehensive care for millions of Americans benefiting from the Medicaid expansion and endangering health care for millions more in including seniors and individuals with disabilities who rely on Medicaid for nursing and home-based care, children and individuals with complex needs who depend on Medicaid to get the help they deserve to stay and thrive in their communities and at school, those suffering from opioid use disorders who count on Medicaid to get the treatment they so desperately need, and individuals impacted by public health emergencies in need of critical care.

It is time for the Trump Administration's ongoing assault on the Medicaid program to end. The public has spoken loud and clear – Medicaid serves as a lifeline to millions of Americans and their loved ones, and they do not want to see it block granted, capped, or gutted. As members of the Senate Finance Committee, we will continue to stand up and fight to protect the safety net and vital programs like Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security against the Trump Administration's ongoing attempts and threats to slash and gut these essential programs.

Sincerely,



Senator Ron Wyden




Senator Debbie Stabenow

³ *Healthy Adult Opportunity*, CTRS. FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVS. (Jan. 30, 2020), <https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/smd20001.pdf>.


⁴ *Putting America's Health First, FY 2021 President's Budget for HHS*, DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS. (Feb. 10, 2020).




Senator Maria Cantwell




Senator Robert Menendez



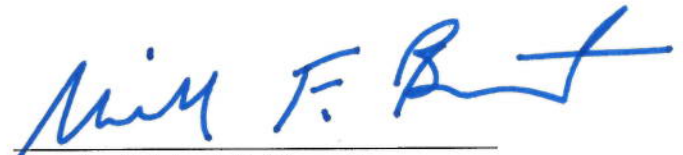
Senator Thomas R. Carper



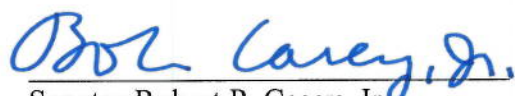
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Senator Catherine Cortez Masto