

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

September 22, 2016

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member,
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Bennet
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Energy, Natural Resources and Infrastructure
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Senior Member
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Member
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for Medicare Affordability and Enrollment Act of 2016

Dear Ranking Member Wyden and Senators Stabenow, Bennet, Nelson and Brown,

Justice in Aging writes to enthusiastically support the Medicare Affordability and Enrollment Act of 2016. We applaud Senator Wyden for introducing this important legislation, as well as Senators Stabenow, Bennet, Nelson and Brown for their co-sponsorship, and we urge the Senate Finance Committee Members and other Members of the Senate to endorse and support this Bill.

Justice in Aging, formerly the National Senior Citizens Law Center, uses the power of law to fight senior poverty. Since 1972 we have worked to preserve programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, which help low-income older adults age with dignity and independence.

Medicare is the cornerstone of our nation's access to health care services for older adults and persons with disabilities. With 6.4 million older Americans living in poverty, it is imperative that we expand access to this vital program. This bill will increase access to Medicare, improve efficiency in the application process, and strengthen the health care safety net.

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We are particularly excited by the provisions of this bill that improve affordability for low-income Medicare beneficiaries by raising the income eligibility standards and revising the asset eligibility standard for the Medicare Savings Programs. The changes to the income eligibility standards create greater alignment with the low-income protections provided through the Affordable Care Act. Further, in light of the changing retirement savings landscape and the shift from defined benefit to defined contribution programs, revising the asset test is essential to maintain access and affordability for low-income Medicare beneficiaries and to encourage prudent savings. Medicare premiums, coinsurance and copayments can create significant barriers to access to care for many low-income older adults and persons with disabilities who cannot afford them. The reforms proposed in the bill would improve the Medicare Savings Programs and make Medicare more affordable and accessible for these low-income individuals.

Thank you for seizing this opportunity and for maintaining your commitment to protecting access to health care for older Americans. We look forward to working with you to advance this legislation. If you have any questions, please contact me at JGoldberg@justiceinaging.org.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Goldberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jennifer Goldberg
Directing Attorney
Justice in Aging