

INTERFAITH DISABILITY ADVOCACY COALITION

c/o AAPD • 2013 H Street, NW, 5th Floor • Washington, DC 20006

December 10, 2012

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned members of the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition and other religious and religiously affiliated organizations write to urge you to protect Medicaid from drastic cuts and other harmful changes to the program through such mechanisms as block grants or global spending caps. We acknowledge the need for the country to address the growing federal debt. However, we believe that any deficit reduction efforts must take into account the importance of Medicaid as a solid foundation to permit people with disabilities to live independent productive lives in their communities.

The Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition (IDAC) is a non-partisan coalition of 29 national faith-based organizations, including representatives from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu traditions, with a mission of mobilizing the religious community to speak out and take action on disability policy issues with Congress, the President and Administration, and society at large.

The shared values of our faiths lead us to support policies and programs that promote independence and dignity for people with disabilities so they can continue contributing to their communities and congregations. Medicaid is a lifeline for more than 8 million Americans with disabilities and a vital public health program for seniors, children, and low-income Medicare beneficiaries who rely on Medicaid to fill Medicare's gaps.

To cite a few examples:

- For people with a variety of physical disabilities such as spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, cerebral palsy, or amputations; Medicaid provides access to wheelchairs, prosthetic devices, and assistive technology.
- For people with epilepsy, mental illness, HIV, and a variety of other conditions; Medicaid is often the only source of access to essential prescription drug coverage.
- For many people with cognitive and other disabilities, Medicaid is an important source of long-term services and supports, which are tools to live and work in the community and to avoid costly, segregated nursing homes and institutions.
- For children with disabilities, Medicaid provides access to the Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment benefit, which requires screening for and treatment of developmental, vision, dental, mental health, and other medical problems.

Current proposals to drastically cut Medicaid spending would jeopardize these critical health and long term care services, and the lives and well-being of the beneficiaries who depend upon them. Under proposals which drastically cut funding for Medicaid, states would have no choice but to sharply restrict enrollment, eligibility, and benefits for people they currently serve.

The mission of the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition (IDAC) is to mobilize the religious community to speak out and take action on disability policy issues with Congress, the President and Administration, and society at large.

Medicaid spending cuts and block grant proposals would have a particularly devastating effect on the provision of long-term care services, as Medicaid is currently the primary funding stream for these services. More than 3 million Americans are currently covered by long-term services and demand is projected to significantly increase in coming decades with the aging of the U.S. population. A loss of long-term services—at the very moment when the need is rising—could make individuals more dependent on the unpaid support of family caregivers or lead to unnecessary institutionalization. We strongly oppose public policies that lead to such institutionalization, because it severs people from society; greatly limiting their ability to contribute economically, socially, politically, and spiritually.

We are eager to work with you to make sure that deficit reduction strategies and any proposed changes to Medicaid maintain the program's integrity and enable people with disabilities to continue to be active participants in their communities and congregations. We look forward to participating in conversations about how we as a nation can achieve deficit reduction, while preserving the rights and dignity of older adults and people with disabilities.

Sincerely,