



Leadership Council of Aging Organizations

May 13, 2009

Dear Senator:

The undersigned groups are members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO). Together, we successfully advocate for and represent the unique interests of millions of America's older adults. Today we are writing to express our support for S. 434, the Empowered at Home Act, introduced by Senators Kerry and Grassley.

Making our long-term care system more effective and efficient is a critical goal as we consider the future of health care reform. Although most people who need long-term care prefer to remain at home, Medicaid spending for long-term care remains heavily weighted toward institutional care. Nationally 75 percent of Medicaid long-term care spending for older people and adults with physical disabilities pays for institutional services, with only 25 percent going to home-and community-based services (HCBS). Under the bill, states would benefit from having more options that allow them to keep people appropriately in home and community settings longer. The more tools states have, the more they and Federal taxpayers can benefit from improving access to generally less expensive home and community-based services (HCBS). This would also enable millions of Americans to maintain their independence, dignity, and choice in the face of daunting health-related challenges.

The *Empowered at Home Act* includes a number of important provisions. For example, the bill would improve the state plan amendment option for HCBS under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, such as by raising the income eligibility level and broadening the scope of covered services, and would implement federal incentives to encourage states to develop and seek approval for such state plan amendments. The bill would also protect against the impoverishment of spouses of those needing Medicaid HCBS, just as these protections are provided to the spouses of nursing home residents on Medicaid. By providing incentives and expanding the range of Medicaid infrastructure improvements for which states can utilize federal dollars, the legislation would take an important step toward improving access to HCBS for Medicaid-eligible consumers and increasing autonomy and community inclusion for older adults and persons with disabilities.

The bill also includes vital provisions that would:

- Provide for a family caregiver tax credit;
- Provide state Medicaid demonstration grants for evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs; and
- Improve Medicaid HCBS data collection.

We urge you to cosponsor the Empowered at Home Act and to include key provisions of this bill in health care reform legislation this year. Support for the bill would help recognize home and community-based services as an integral part of Medicaid long-term care for America's most vulnerable citizens. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all consumers of long-term care are provided access to a range of services that best meet their needs in the most appropriate and desirable setting possible.

Sincerely,

AARP

Alliance for Retired Americans

Alzheimer's Association

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

American Foundation for the Blind

American Postal Workers Union Retirees

American Society on Aging

Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges

Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America

Center for Medicare Advocacy

Easter Seals

Gray Panthers

Lutheran Services of America

Military Officers Association of America

National Alliance for Caregiving

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging

National Association For Hispanic Elderly

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

National Council on Aging

National Senior Citizens Law Center

NCCNHR: The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

Service Employees International Union

United Jewish Communities

Wider Opportunities For Women