The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
Chairman  
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

The following members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) are writing to express our deep appreciation for the effort that has gone into getting the Affordable Health Choices Act successfully passed by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. This comprehensive health reform legislation represents a positive sea change that will significantly improve access to health and long term services and supports for people with disabilities and chronic conditions.

CCD, a coalition of national consumer, service provider and professional organizations, advocates on behalf of persons with disabilities and chronic conditions and their families. We believe that the goal of health care reform should be to assure that all Americans, including people with disabilities and chronic conditions, have access to high quality, comprehensive, affordable health care that meets their individual needs and enables them to be healthy, functional, live as independently as possible, and participate in the community. This measure goes a long way toward meeting that goal.

Many of the provisions will greatly improve the lives of people with disabilities and chronic conditions. In particular, we strongly support the insurance market reforms, including guaranteed issue and renewal of coverage in the individual and small group markets, the prohibition of pre-existing health condition exclusions, and the end of annual and lifetime insurance caps with a limit on out of pocket spending.

We greatly appreciate the bill’s recognition of essential benefit categories that improve the ability of people with disabilities and chronic conditions to maintain and improve their functional ability. Specifically, we are most grateful for the Committee’s inclusion of coverage of rehabilitation and habilitation “devices” as well as services in the essential benefits package. This statutory language establishes coverage for durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS) which are critical to the disability and chronic illness
population. The bill also covers as essential benefits rehabilitative, habilitative, and mental health and substance abuse services -- all of which are critical to enabling people with disabilities to function independently.

We also applaud the inclusion of the Community Living Assistance Supports and Services (CLASS) Act in the Affordable Health Choices Act. For persons with disabilities and chronically ill older Americans – arguably the most vulnerable populations in the nation – long term services and supports are their primary unmet care need, and are critical to promoting health and preventing illness. The landmark CLASS Act is the threshold to meaningful change ensuring that individuals are able to function as independently as possible within their homes, families, and their communities.

Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff to secure final passage of meaningful and comprehensive health reform legislation that meets the needs of all Americans this year.

Sincerely,

Academy for Educational Development
ACCSES
Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association on Health and Disability
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American Foundation for the Blind
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association
American Network of Community Options and Resources
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Amputee Coalition of America
APSE
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism Society of America
Autism Speaks
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Burton Blatt Institute
CHADD - Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Parent Attorney’s and Advocates
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Family Voices
Helen Keller National Center
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Lutheran Services in America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Institute
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Rehabilitation Association
National Respite Coalition
National Spinal Cord Injury Association
Paralyzed Veterans of America
RESNA – Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
TASH
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
United Jewish Communities
United Spinal Association
World Institute on Disability

For additional information, please contact any of the individuals below.

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