



March 14, 2005

Dear Senator:

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) strongly urges you to support the Smith-Bingaman amendment during floor consideration of the FY 2006 Budget Resolution. The Smith-Bingaman amendment will restore the \$15 billion Medicaid cut that is assumed in the Budget Committee's reconciliation instruction and create a bipartisan commission to conduct a comprehensive review to determine how to improve service delivery and quality in the most cost-effective way possible under Medicaid

CCD is a Washington-based coalition of national organizations that represent children and adults with disabilities and their families, service providers and advocates. The CCD is strongly supportive of the Medicaid program, which is the only source of appropriate health and long-term care services for nearly nine million children and adults with disabilities. It gives children with severe disabilities access to physical and occupational therapy so they can lead healthy and more active lives and continue to live at home with their families; and participate actively in the community in which they live. It provides essential supports so that adults with disabilities can live in the community where they belong instead of in inappropriate institutions. We believe that the individual entitlement to Medicaid – with its critical federal protections and the open-ended financing system, has contributed mightily to Medicaid's past successes.

**Medicaid is the lynchpin for children and adults with disabilities to live with dignity and independence.**

- Medicaid is the primary public source of funding for long-term services and supports for people with disabilities of all ages. Medicaid typically is the only source of funding to support people with disabilities in the community instead of in costly, inappropriate, and segregated nursing homes or institutions.
- For children with all types of disabilities, access to the cost-effective Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit, with its screenings, services and therapies, can make a major difference in their lives. Access to these important services enables them to lead healthy and more active lives; avoid additional disabilities; continue to live at home with their families; make it through school; get and keep a job; and participate actively in the community in which they live
- Medicaid is the largest source of financing for HIV/AIDS care, as well as state and local spending on mental health, mental retardation, and developmental disabilities services in the

country. These services help ensure that children and adults with disabilities have access to the supports necessary to live healthier, more independent, and productive lives.

- For people with epilepsy, mental illness, and a variety of other conditions, Medicaid often is the only source of access to life-saving prescription drug coverage.
- For people with a variety of physical disabilities, such as spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, cerebral palsy, or amputations, Medicaid usually is the only way to access durable medical equipment like wheelchairs or prosthetic devices, as well as assistive technology. These are the very supports that allow individuals to live independent and productive lives, be employed, and part of the community.

Medicaid is essential to the viability of the nation's health care system and more effective than the private market at reining in health care costs -- Medicaid keeps private insurance premiums lower than they otherwise would because it covers the people with the greatest health care needs and the highest costs. Other payers could learn much from Medicaid's success -- as its spending has grown at a much slower rate than private health insurance. From 2002 to 2004, per-person spending in Medicaid rose 6.7 percent, almost half the 12.5 percent rate of the private market. The growing cost of health care in our country is an issue that must be resolved. According to a recent report by the Census Bureau, the number of uninsured people rose by 1.4 million (to 45 million) between 2002 and 2003. As the number of people with private insurance falls, Medicaid provides an important counter balance. Medicaid's role in picking up the slack by enrolling low-income children is an important one. In addition, Medicaid provides critical supports to dually-eligible Medicare beneficiaries and its funding supports the nation's public health infrastructure, including public hospitals and community health centers.

CCD believes that the policy debate must be refocused onto how to ensure adequate and appropriate resources for a successful Medicaid program and how to enact structural changes in the nation's health care system so that Medicaid and other payers can continue to finance the costs of necessary health and long-term services and supports.

The Senate Budget Committee's reconciliation instruction to cut \$15 billion in Medicaid spending over five years is unacceptable to consumers, providers, states, and others who care about providing health and long-term services to children and adults with disabilities and their families.

We are all fortunate to live in a great nation. This greatness is reflected, in part, in the manner in which we support all of our residents, including people with disabilities. Even though many people with disabilities and their families still struggle to access needed benefits and services, our nation can be truly proud of Medicaid. Building an America where we all want to live must be an ongoing effort, one that requires each of us to contribute to a free, compassionate, and hopeful world for ourselves and future generations.

Medicaid is a lifeline for millions of children and adults with disabilities. On their behalf, we urge you to support the Smith-Bingaman amendment. Thank you.

On behalf of:

