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National Caregiver Coalition to National Governors Association: Establish State Task Forces to Monitor Medicaid Spending, Ascertain Funds Going to Protect Seniors

Coalition to Protect Senior Care Letter to Governors Rendell, Douglas Says to Use Medicaid Funds for Seniors – Not Unrelated State Projects

Joplin, MO – In a new letter to National Governors Association (NGA) Chairman Ed Rendell (D-PA) and James Douglas (R-VT), the Coalition to Protect Senior Care (CPSC), a national coalition of front line caregiver advocacy groups, today urged the nation's Governors to ensure new state Medicaid funds disbursed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) actually go towards meeting poor seniors' care needs, and are not diverted to other state spending priorities that have nothing at all to do with eldercare.

"Now that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has been passed into law, and states begin to receive the Medicaid funds that have the capacity to protect seniors' access to quality care, we are concerned there is no guarantee funds will be used for the intended purpose of protecting care access," writes Lori Porter, co-founder of the National Association of Health Care Assistants (NAHCA), and a senior spokesperson for the Coalition to Protect Senior Care, based in Joplin, MO. "Unfortunately, these Medicaid resources can be diverted to other state spending priorities – priorities that have nothing at all to do with eldercare. Doing so would be unwise and unfair."

Later this morning, President Obama announced at a White House meeting with the NGA that in order to bring prompt economic relief, states will be able to access the first two quarters of Federal Medical Assistance Percentage Funding (FMAP) starting this Wednesday, February 25. In making the announcement, the President said that the swift release of these funds would prevent the need for states to make cuts to critical healthcare services, such as eldercare.

The President stated, "This plan will also help ensure that you don't need to make cuts to essential services Americans rely on now more than ever... By the time most of you get home, money will be waiting to help 20 million vulnerable Americans in your states keep their health coverage. Children with asthma will be able to breathe easier, seniors won't need to fear losing their doctors, and pregnant women with limited means won't need to worry about the health of their babies."

In the CPSC letter, Porter urged Governors to use the enhanced federal Medicaid funds provided through ARRA to reverse cuts already made to health care providers, and to prevent new cuts being considered. "Ensuring impoverished seniors in nursing homes continue to receive high quality care is contingent upon the ability of facilities to hire and retain appropriate numbers of registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and certified nursing assistants (CNAs)," she continued. "When state officials choose to cut Medicaid funding to

providers, they are often forced to eliminate critical nursing staff positions – ultimately to the detriment of seniors’ care needs.”

Porter applauded the Governors for developing strategies for disbursing ARRA funds, and to establish transparency and spending accountability. “Governors are implementing a number of best practices provisions in regard to how these new Medicaid funds will be spent, and the nation’s front line care givers support these initiatives, and this approach.”

In this context, Porter said every state would benefit from a special task force that would monitor and report to the public specifically where this new federal Medicaid funding is allocated. “Doing so would establish maximum transparency – and enable stakeholders to ascertain what percentage of funds goes towards meeting poor seniors’ care needs, and the degree to which these funds are redirected to other priorities unrelated to seniors. Ensuring these Medicaid funds are directed towards seniors and the front line nursing staff who care for them will not only help ensure patients retain access to quality nursing home care, but also protect and help create the key facility staff jobs that make an enormous difference in patient outcomes.”

The Coalition to Protect Senior Care consists of the American Association for Long Term Care Nursing (AALTCN); the American College of Health Care Administrators (ACHCA); the American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators (AANAC); the National Rural Health Association (NRHA); the American Association of Nurse Executives (AANEX); the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA); the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA); the American Society of Health Care Administration Executives (ASHCAE); the American Health Care Association (AHCA); the American Health Quality Association (AHQA); the National Association for the Support of Long Term Care (NASL); the National Association of Health Care Assistants (NAHCA); the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care; the Coalition of Women in Long Term Care (COWL); and the Nurse Executive Council.

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