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July 20, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our three million members and the 50 million students they serve, we strongly urge you to oppose the motion to proceed on health care repeal, including the Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017, which would take away health insurance from millions of people, gut Medicaid, and allow insurers to sell useless junk coverage. We also urge you to oppose any bill modeled after the Restoring Americans' Healthcare Freedom Reconciliation Act of 2015, which would cause even more people to lose health coverage. Votes associated with these issues *will be* included in NEA's Report Card for the 115th Congress.

Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that under this bill, 22 million Americans would lose health coverage over the next decade, including many of the most vulnerable: children, the poor, the sick, and the elderly. The centerpiece of the bill is a radical rollback of federal funding for Medicaid, which covers 40 percent of all children and 60 percent of children with disabilities. Instead of the federal government paying a percentage of actual Medicaid spending, each state would get a set amount and choose between a block grant and "per capita cap" or flat amount for certain Medicaid beneficiaries.

To compensate for the loss of federal support, states are likely to divert money from education to health care as well as limit the number of Medicaid beneficiaries, the scope of Medicaid benefits, or both. Services essential for students to learn and thrive would be in jeopardy, especially for students with disabilities and special needs. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Medicaid reimburses schools for mental health care, vision and hearing screenings, diabetes and asthma management, wheelchairs and hearing aids, and more. That support is substantial — \$4 billion a year, according to AASA, the school superintendents association.

Deep cuts in federal support for Medicaid could also cause many low-income seniors and disabled people to lose health care they need to survive. Medicaid pays for 60 percent of America's 1.3 million nursing home residents and makes Medicare affordable for millions more by subsidizing premiums, deductibles, and other costs.

Allowing insurers to sell useless junk coverage

This approach would divide the health insurance market into haves and have nots. Premiums may drop for those willing to risk skimpy coverage that pays for practically nothing, but they

would skyrocket for many others. They include people with pre-existing conditions, people plagued by chronic ailments like high blood pressure and diabetes, older people, and those who buy insurance that will actually help them if they get sick. Insurance companies could exclude essential benefits like mental health care, prescription drugs, and hospitalization — the very services for which people buy insurance — and impose annual or lifetime dollar-based limits on crucial benefits, as they did before the Affordable Care Act prohibited these practices. Millions would have no coverage at all because they could not afford to buy it.

Restoring Americans' Healthcare Freedom Reconciliation Act of 2015

CBO found that under this bill, premiums would double and an additional 10 million people would lose health coverage over the next decade — a total of 32 million or nearly 10 percent of the U.S. population. Both the individual insurance market and employment-based coverage would be weakened by the elimination of financial penalties for individuals not buying — and large employers not providing — health coverage. Some employers may gut their health plans or stop offering coverage altogether, since they would no longer be penalized for doing so.

The bottom line is that the “replacement” for the Affordable Care Act reneges on the promise to deliver better, less costly health coverage for all Americans. We strongly urge you to oppose the motion to proceed on repeal of the Affordable Care Act, including through the Better Care Reconciliation Act, and any legislation modeled after the Restoring Americans' Healthcare Freedom Reconciliation Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association