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July 13, 2012

The Honorable John Rockefeller
United States Senate
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Rockefeller:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding You've Earned a Say and the importance of the Medicaid program to millions of Americans, including older adults who need long-term services and supports (LTSS). We appreciate your strong legislative record of advocating for older Americans and for fighting for Medicaid.

Medicaid, the joint state and federal program, is critical to the health security of millions of Americans and provides a vital LTSS safety net to millions of older adults and persons with disabilities, although it is financed differently than Social Security and Medicare. AARP shares your concerns about proposals that would make harmful cuts or changes to Medicaid, and we have and will continue to strongly advocate at both the state and federal levels to protect this essential program and the people it serves.

As you correctly point out, Medicaid has been a target during budget negotiations with little concern being paid to how cuts to the program will affect the nearly 70 million people who depend upon the program for their health care. Over the last few years, AARP has been at the forefront of efforts to oppose harmful proposals to block grant Medicaid. We believe block grants would put both current and future seniors in need of Medicaid services at risk.

Furthermore, we believe Medicaid cut-backs could lead to reduced access and inadequate care for those who are already in nursing homes or are receiving home and community-based services. For individuals who do not yet need long-term services and supports or can still pay for these services themselves, if the time comes and they have exhausted their savings, they may likely be turned away or offered insufficient care that neither meets their needs nor maintains their dignity.

It is clear that the Supreme Court's ruling on the Medicaid expansion will only magnify the debate surrounding future Medicaid reforms. AARP filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court regarding the importance of Medicaid expansion during the critically important ACA case. We remain concerned about the availability of affordable health care for low-income Americans in light of the Court's decision to give states the option to participate in the Medicaid expansion. The Medicaid expansion requirement would have ensured health care coverage for more than 17 million people-including single adults who will be eligible for Medicaid coverage for the first time.

As states consider whether to take up the option to expand their programs, AARP will be working aggressively at the state level to advocate on behalf of low-income Americans who would stand to benefit from the expanded Medicaid coverage.

The Honorable Senator Rockefeller
July 13, 2012
Page 2

Since the enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), AARP has been actively engaged at both the state and federal levels regarding implementation of the Medicaid provisions in the ACA. As you know, during the Congressional consideration of the law, AARP successfully fought for inclusion in the ACA of new and improved options for states to expand access to Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS), so that a greater number of older adults and persons with disabilities can live in their homes and communities. AARP submitted extensive comments on proposed federal regulations to implement these HCBS options, and at the state level we are encouraging states to take up these important new options. We worked to support efforts to enhance Medicaid payments to primary care physicians and to implement Medicaid eligibility determination changes under ACA in a way that does not harm current Medicaid recipients who already receive coverage for LTSS.

As you noted, Medicaid is the nation's largest payer for long-term care. Nearly a third of those turning age 65 will have LTSS costs that exceed their ability to pay and will need Medicaid assistance to help with LTSS. Medicaid is a last resort for these individuals, especially when faced with depleted savings and high care costs. AARP worked at both the federal and state levels to protect and strengthen this safety net, whether it is expanding HCBS, preventing cuts to HCBS, expanding coverage, or making other program improvements.

For more than a decade, our AARP state offices have been leading legislative efforts to protect and expand Medicaid coverage and home and community services and supports. In 2011, 48 of our state offices were engaged in Medicaid advocacy throughout the nation and our work led to over 30 advocacy successes at the state level related to the expansion of Medicaid LTSS/HCBS.

In West Virginia, AARP West Virginia developed a strategy and led a coordinated effort that included both provider and constituency groups to advocate for the restoration of funds the Governor proposed to cut from the Medicaid Aged and Disabled Waiver program in his 2013 budget proposal. As a result, the state legislature included an additional \$1.75 million in the FY 2013 state budget which will maintain important Medicaid funding for home and community-based services at 2012 levels. AARP WV, working with partners in AARP's national office, also presented the Governor's office and the State Medicaid Director with a "white paper" on Home and Community Based Services in West Virginia that outlined potential funding opportunities for future consideration. AARP WV also plans to work with the Governor's office, the state legislature, and other key stakeholders on Medicaid expansion once again demonstrating our commitment to the Medicaid program.

Like you, AARP is a committed advocate for our nation's Medicaid population and looks forward to being an active participant in future Medicaid discussions at both the federal and state levels. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you in the near future to discuss the vital importance of Medicaid and have a dialogue on how the program can be strengthened for the future. If you have any questions, feel free to call me, or please have your staff contact Joyce Rogers, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs at 202-434-3750.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Barry Rand". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Sincerely," text.

A. Barry Rand