

**Center for Disability Rights – Center for Independence of the Disabled NY
Community Service Society of NY – Empire Justice Center – Legal Aid Society – Medicare Rights Center
New York Association on Independent Living – Selfhelp Community Services, Inc.**

April 20, 2012

Mr. Mark Kissinger
New York State Department of Health
Empire State Plaza, Corning Tower, 14th Floor
Albany, New York 12237

Re: New York State Department of Health's Demonstration to Integrate Care for Dual Eligible Individuals
(Draft Proposal for Public Comment, March 22, 2012).

By email submission: mltcworkgroup@health.state.ny.us

Dear Mr. Kissinger,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on New York State's recently released demonstration proposal to integrate care for dually eligible beneficiaries (FIDA proposal). We, the undersigned, work in the health, disability and aging communities. We help dually eligible New Yorkers understand their health coverage and how they can obtain needed services.

As a threshold matter, we believe insurance based managed care demonstrations, such as the FIDA proposal, can serve as one of many demonstration projects, but should not be the only model the State pursues. The FIDA proposal carves out participants in pioneer accountable care organizations (ACOs). It should similarly carve out participants in shared-savings ACOs and other demonstrations that are developed such as a managed fee-for-service demonstration.

As New York State notes in its FIDA proposal, dually eligible beneficiaries are more likely to fall below the poverty level and are more likely to be in ill health than beneficiaries enrolled into only Medicare or only Medicaid. We believe that New York's demonstration project offers a unique opportunity to address the numerous and complex problems faced by dually eligible New Yorkers; however, we are also concerned that New York's approach poses significant risks. More specifically, we are concerned that:

- Access and quality of care may be compromised in the name of saving money.
- There may be inadequate provider buy-in resulting in poor quality of care and limited access.
- The move from fee-for-service to insurance based managed care may compromise care by disrupting provider relationships, destabilizing the current safety net and creating a care system based on networks rather than need. There is much talk that the current system "doesn't work," and indeed New York's hospital re-admission rates and hospital infection rates are problematic.

But in many important ways the system *does* work – dual eligibles have access to some of the finest medical Centers of Excellence, research and teaching institutions in the nation. Reduced access to these critical providers is a real threat if managed care plans limit their networks.

- New regulations governing FIDA plans may undermine, ignore, or circumvent important beneficiary rights and protections grounded in the Medicare and Medicaid laws and in the State and Federal Constitutions.
- FIDA plans may not be tailored to meet the unique needs of subpopulations being served by subprograms that currently exist in the Medicaid program.
- FIDA programs may have the unintended consequence of incentivizing institutionalization, in contradiction to the State's commitment to the implementation of the Supreme Court's decision in *Olmstead v L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999).

Overall, we believe that the FIDA proposal evidences careful consideration of some of these risks. However, we urge New York State to make further clarifications and modifications before submitting its proposal to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Promising elements – with concerns and additional protections needed

We commend New York State for incorporating the following elements to help mitigate risks and promote the well-being of dual eligible New Yorkers. We urge the state to retain these elements in its final demonstration, with additional protections and clarifications.

- **We support the proposal's creation of an independent FIDA participant Ombudsman with broad authority to assist consumers.** Although existing resources and community based organizations should continue to be important advocates, an unbiased ombudsman is needed given the enormous task of shifting dually eligible beneficiaries from fee-for-service into managed care networks and the speed at which the change is proposed to take place. As proposed by New York State, the independent ombudsman will provide information and counseling to beneficiaries regarding FIDA plan coverage and advocate on behalf of aggrieved beneficiaries with the plans. We have four additional suggestions to strengthen the ombudsman's role. First, we recommend the ombudsman's role be expanded to track systemic issues experienced by FIDA plan enrollees. Second, we recommend that the ombudsman be housed in one or more non-profit community-based organizations that have a proven track record of serving dual eligibles. Third, we recommend that each plan be required to appoint a liaison to work with ombudsman staff to resolve problems experienced by enrollees. Fourth, the ombudsman must be equipped to assist beneficiaries in navigating the plan landscape.
- **We support the requirement that every FIDA plan must have a Participant Advisory Committee (PAC) that is open to all beneficiaries and their family representatives.** Requiring the PAC to meet quarterly and providing a forum for beneficiaries and families to voice their concerns and questions is an important channel for beneficiary engagement. In order to ensure

unbiased and prompt reporting of the information shared at these meetings, we suggest that DOH staff attend a sample of PAC meetings on a rotating basis each month, and that all plans provide summaries of the questions and concerns raised at their quarterly PAC meetings to DOH. DOH should publish a consumer friendly summary of PAC reports, including the steps each plan is taking to address beneficiary concerns.

- **We support the lack of a FIDA plan lock-in period.** We agree with New York's proposal to allow beneficiaries to leave their FIDA plans at any time. However, we disagree with the state's plan to permit FIDA plan changes and reenrollments only in January and July and recommend that beneficiaries should have the right to continuous open enrollment in FIDA plans. We note that in the current Medicare Advantage program, dual eligible individuals have Special Enrollment Periods to change Medicare Advantage plans on a monthly basis. Duals in New York's demonstration project should not lose this important right.

As the State acknowledges this population is more likely to have complex health needs than their peers enrolled in Medicare only or Medicaid only. For that reason, it is important to allow for flexibility in plan choice. At present, dually eligible New Yorkers can see any provider who accepts Medicare and Medicaid, and many choose to use Medicare providers who do not accept Medicaid, paying the coinsurance with their "spend-down" or with a Medigap policy. The shift into insurance-based managed care networks will limit this broad provider access and allowing beneficiaries greater flexibility to switch FIDA plans will help them gain access to different or expanded provider networks as their care needs change. Further, permitting beneficiaries who disenroll from a FIDA plan only a choice of returning to Original Medicare or Medicare Advantage, without the option of switching to a different FIDA plan, defeats the State objective of encouraging care coordination

- **We support the proposed continuation of benefits pending an appeal.** Aid continuing during the pendency of an appeal is an essential and well-established due process right in the Medicaid program. By allowing beneficiaries to continue to access long-term care, behavioral health services or other long term services for chronic conditions during an appeal, New York State will help ensure that this low income population will not need to pay for their care out of pocket, or more damagingly and likely, to forgo care or be left at risk without necessary long term care. We ask the State to clarify that this right to continued benefits pending appeal exists regardless of whether the plan's reduction or termination of a service is at the end of an "authorization period" for that service, which would require revision of the proposed regulation 18 NYCRR 360-10.8(e)(2) (currently in effect as an emergency regulation).
- **We support the proposal's very limited cost sharing for beneficiaries.** Beneficiaries in FIDA plans would not be responsible for any deductibles, coinsurances, co-payments, financial penalties or any other fees except for Medicare Part D Prescription Drug co-payments, and those receiving Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) would be exempt from Part D copayments as well. This protection, as required by CMS, will enable beneficiaries to afford needed health care services.

- **We support the proposal's exclusion of populations participating in alternative coordinated care models.** The FIDA proposal hopes to deliver improved care and coordination, and to achieve savings for the State and Federal government. Other models, Health Homes, PACE, ACOs and fee-for service models like enhanced Primary Care Case Management (PCCM), are designed to achieve the same results. The relationship between FIDA plans and these models needs clarification.
 - We agree that participants in pioneer ACOs and PACE programs should be excluded from the demonstration and would urge that participants in the other coordination models listed above be likewise exempted from FIDA enrollment, if FIDA enrollment is not voluntary.
 - The mechanism for identifying dual eligibles enrolled in these other models needs development. Some dual eligibles may be retroactively assigned to ACOs for example, and processes will need to be identified for identifying them, informing them of their excluded status with regard to FIDA enrollment, and making all their options clear to them.
 - As described more fully below, we believe that enrollment in FIDA plans should be voluntary. However, if the State adopts passive enrollment, the independent enrollment broker counseling regarding plan choice and enrollment should have the ability not just to provide counseling about these other options but to actually process those enrollments. Otherwise, we are concerned that the ability of other programs, like PACE, to attract enrollees will be unduly restricted.

Elements to be Added/Improved

1) Enrollment

New York currently proposes passive enrollment of beneficiaries into FIDA plans. Under the current proposal, New York would begin passively enrolling dually eligible beneficiaries into FIDA plans in January 2014 in two phases over two years:

Phase One in 2014 would passively enroll those enrolled in mandatory managed long term care (MLTC) – approximately 123,880 people (this is the number of individuals receiving LTSS in home and community based service (HCBS) settings in the target 8-county metropolitan area on the chart on page 8 of the State's proposal).

Phase Two in 2015 would passively enroll those *not* enrolled in MLTC – the balance of the 460,109 dually eligible beneficiaries in the target area, or 336,229 duals.

We appreciate the State's desire to reach a level of FIDA enrollment that would achieve scale and facilitate a programmatic evaluation. However, we have serious concerns about the State's plan to shift most dually eligible New Yorkers into the FIDA plans, and the use of passive enrollment to do so.

- a. **As a threshold matter, we question whether passive enrollment of Medicare beneficiaries into private Medicare insurance products is permissible under existing Federal law.¹ We also question whether Section 1115A(d)(1) gives authority to waive dual eligibles' rights as Medicaid beneficiaries under sections 1902(a)(23) and 1932(a)(2)(B) of the Medicaid statute.** These provisions, respectively, establish the right of freedom of choice of provider, and exclude dually eligible New Yorkers from mandatory enrollment in Medicaid managed care.
- b. **We recommend that, for at least the first year after implementing the FIDA program, the State employ a voluntary opt-in, rather than passive enrollment with an opt-out, for FIDA plans and alternatives.** This will allow FIDA plans to get their offerings in place and then to attract enrollees by publicizing their strengths. It is premature and risky to shift more than half of New York's dual eligibles to new and untested FIDA plans. FIDA is most like Medicaid Advantage Plus, which is too new and small to test scalability, access, effectiveness.² We believe that the State should allow accountable care organizations (ACO's), PACE programs, and health homes to flourish and then evaluate which model is most appropriately scalable and effective.
- c. If Passive Enrollment is implemented, we have concerns about the State's current proposal to begin enrollment in FIDA plans with the MLTC plan population.
 - i. **Phase One. We recommend that the State start instead with part of the currently proposed Phase Two population – the 6,600 current Medicaid Advantage (MA) members – rather than MLTC members.** Since the MA members already are accustomed to accessing both Medicare and Medicaid primary care through managed care, they are a more appropriate population to enroll into these new managed care insurance products.

We disagree with the proposed auto-assignment of dual eligible beneficiaries into FIDA plans operated by the same insurer that operates their MLTC plan. By definition, MLTC plans do not include primary medical care, except for the very limited specialties of podiatry, dental care, optometry and audiology. An MLTC member will receive their primary care in 2012 and 2013 through Original Medicare or through their own chosen Medicare Advantage plan – which may *not* be operated by the same parent that operates the MLTC plan. The proposed enrollment protocol that would assign the individual to the FIDA plan operated by the same entity that operates the MLTC plan would have no more than a random chance of ensuring continuity of the member's primary care providers.

The only type of plan match that might minimize disruption of provider relationships would be to match the dual eligible to the FIDA plan that is operated by the same company that operates the individual's Medicare Advantage plan, accompanying

¹ See, 42 C.F.R. 431.51.

² The program had 1496 enrollees in the 8-county demonstration area as of March 2012. See http://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/managed_care/reports/enrollment/monthly/.

prescription medication benefit, *and* the individual's MLTC plan. Since the dual eligible would presumably have found a primary care physician in the MA plan's network, adequate medication coverage in network, and is already receiving long term care services through the MLTC plan, continuity of care would be more probable.

If different companies operate the individual's MLTC and Medicare Advantage plans, or if the individual is not in a Medicare Advantage plan, there should be no automatic assignment to the FIDA plan whose owner happens to operate the MLTC plan; the broker must counsel the individual on the choices, with an individualized inquiry as to whether the member's current physician's or other providers are in this FIDA plan's network.

- ii. *Phase Two.* In Phase Two in 2015, the proposal would passively enroll those not in an MLTC plan, but who are in a Medicaid Advantage plan in fall 2014, into the FIDA plan operated by the same sponsor as the Medicaid Advantage plan. As stated above, if the State does pursue passive enrollment, we recommend moving this group to Phase One instead of MLTC recipients. However, we firmly restate our position that passive enrollment of dually eligible New Yorkers into Medicaid managed care would violate section 1932(a)(2)(B) of the Medicaid statute. Until federal law allows mandatory enrollment of dual eligibles into Medicaid managed care plans, this part of Phase Two may not be implemented. Ultimately, should the State automatically enroll opt-out beneficiaries into Medicaid managed care, it must ensure thorough disenrollment counseling, outlined in 1(d) of these comments. Otherwise, beneficiaries risk enrolling into multiple managed care plans operated by separate insurers. This undermines the State's goal of care coordination.
- d. Independent brokers must look holistically at all services and providers the beneficiary accesses before defaulting to an insurance product offered by the same carrier who provides the beneficiary's Medicare or MLTC insurance product, except perhaps in the rare situation where the FIDA plan has the same operator as both the Medicare Advantage, with accompanying drug coverage, and MLTC plan the individual is enrolled in, and the same provider network.

Moreover, through safeguards and counseling, the broker and computerized enrollment systems must prevent combinations of plans that might be detrimental to the beneficiary's access to health services. Beneficiaries will need to be counseled on both FIDA enrollment and FIDA disenrollment options and how their choice may affect their current health care services and access health services they may need in the future. For example, if the proposal is administered as written, in Phase Two Medicaid Advantage members will be passively enrolled into a FIDA plan. The proposal does not allow those opting out of a FIDA plan and back into their Medicaid Advantage plan a special enrollment period to later access LTSS should the need arise outside of the two prescribed enrollment periods. Consequently, although by definition this

population does not have LTSS, in selecting a plan they will need to be counseled on their LTSS options should they develop LTSS needs.

The Ombudsman's office should be trained on FIDA plan choice and FIDA plan disenrollment, as the office will be an important resource for beneficiaries navigating this new FIDA plan landscape.

Although the plan references the enrollment protocols developed for New York's mandatory Medicaid managed long term care carve-in, which have not yet been fully developed let alone tested, it must be clarified that an enrollment broker would be *required* to work with the beneficiary before enrolling him or her into a FIDA plan.

"Thoughtful" enrollment assistance must, at minimum, include:

- **An explanation of the beneficiary's rights to opt out of a FIDA plan and their options for accessing both primary medical care and LTSS – Original Medicare, pioneer ACO, or Medicaid fee-for-service or PACE, MAPlus, or a Medicaid managed long term care product if LTSS are needed.**
 - **The opportunity for an individual to register their intention to opt out in advance of receiving enrollment materials.**
 - **The limited right to enroll into a FIDA plan during the two annual enrollment periods, as currently proposed.**
 - **A plan comparison tool, similar to Medicare's PlanFinder, which a beneficiary with the assistance of the enrollment counselor could use to input their doctors, services and prescriptions and determine which, if any, FIDA plan best suits their particular needs.**
 - **Information to beneficiaries about other independent sources of counseling, including Community Health Advocates (CHA), the Facilitated Enrollment program for people with disabilities, the FIDA Ombudsman's office, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), independent living centers, and other organizations with experience with the Medicare or Medicaid program.**
- e. **The time allotted for plan selection should be 90 days, to give adequate time for investigation as to provider networks, as well as counseling from the broker and other sources listed above.**
- f. **Notices that will be provided to beneficiaries subject to passive enrollment should not be developed by the broker or plan, but by the State with stakeholder input.** The State should host beneficiary test groups to elicit suggestions and ensure the notices are understandable. All materials must be made available in alternate formats, designed for a low-vision reader, and be appropriate for a low-literacy audience. Type size, font, contrast, etc. must conform with print publication guidelines <http://www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/design/accessible-print-design/making-text-legible>. The State should incorporate beneficiary comments and

suggestions, and should ensure that all materials are well translated into several languages. We recommend the State define prevalent Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations as populations of 500 individuals or more in the proposed plan service areas who speak a specific language. State drafting will guard against notices being produced by entities with a financial stake in enrollment. Moreover, it will prevent enrollment notices from varying between plans.

- g. The proposal does not place a limit on the number of FIDA plans a particular insurance carrier can offer. **New York should limit the number of FIDA plan insurers and the number of FIDA plan offerings each insurer is permitted to sell.** Ensuring that beneficiaries have a choice of FIDA plans is important; however, equally important is that the choice is meaningful. In our experience working with beneficiaries in the context of Medicare Advantage and Part D, beneficiaries presented with an excessive menu of choices often end up enrolling into plans that do not include their needed services and providers. The State must make clear that duplicative, or nearly duplicative, FIDA plans from the insurer will not be certified as FIDA plans by New York State. We encourage New York to go further and require consistent naming of plans and classify the FIDA as well as Medicaid Advantage and MAPlus plans as is done for Medigap policies, which must be classified into easy-to-compare types.³ Governing FIDA plans in this way would facilitate ‘apple to apples’ comparisons. Given the State’s unique opportunity to build the FIDA plan benefits and structure from the ground up, a failure to build plan benefit designs that allowed for easy comparisons would be a squandered opportunity.
- h. The State notes that Medicare Special Needs Plans (SNPs) are poised to develop additional product lines to provide FIDA plans. **We caution the State against relying on the SNP model for guidance, although SNPs promise coordinated care for beneficiaries, our experience in New York is that the promise is often not realized, in part because this function is not well defined in Federal regulation.** Under current law, SNP networks may include providers who do not accept Medicaid, leaving duals with high and unexpected cost sharing. Although this problem would presumably be resolved with FIDA plans, it is just one of many reasons against using SNP plans as a model for FIDA plans. SNPs often fail to provide beneficiaries with updated and comprehensible explanations of the plan benefits and how to access them. Similarly, because the Medicare regulations specific to SNP plans and sub-regulatory guidance do not provide strong beneficiary protections, we caution the State against incorporating Federal SNP guidance into FIDA plan guidance.
- i. **We applaud the lack of a lock-in period, allowing members to disenroll any time from a FIDA plan. However, we disagree with the state’s plan to permit FIDA plan changes and reenrollments only in January and July.** Permitting beneficiaries who disenroll from a FIDA plan only a choice of returning to Original Medicare or Medicare Advantage, without the option of switching to a different FIDA plan, defeats the State objective of encouraging care coordination.

³ As an example, Fidelis has three dual eligible SNPs – Fidelis Dual Advantage, Fidelis Dual Advantage Plus, and Fidelis Dual Advantage Flex. The latter “flex” plan is NOT a Medicaid Advantage plan contrary to its name – it covers only Medicare services. This confusing use of terms of art must be standardized.

Since dual eligibles have the right to switch Medicare Advantage and Part D plans once per month, we question whether the State may limit this right for FIDA plans.

If the State does not adopt an open enrollment period, as we suggest, it must provide Special Enrollment Periods (SEPs), similar to those available in the Medicare program. For example, a dual who for the first time needs Medicaid LTSS should have the option of enrolling in FIDA, along with MLTC and MAPlus, since the new service needs would change the considerations of whether or not to enroll in a FIDA or to select a different plan type, as well as considerations for selecting a particular plan. Such an approach would also be consistent with the State-run Healthy New York program and the new regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guiding Exchange enrollment into Qualified Health Plans.

Also, members need protection from common disruptions in their Medicaid enrollment due to annual renewal problems, bureaucratic errors and other reasons. The FIDA plan should not be able to disenroll members immediately when these interruptions occur – the plan should receive their capitation rate for an adequate period, and be required to assist the member in resolving the Medicaid enrollment issue. While some of these problems may lessen with state streamlining initiatives in the renewal process, the problems will continue to occur and must be addressed.

2) Network adequacy

- a. We oppose the proposal's definition of minimum provider networks; two of every provider for each service identified in the plan benefit package is not adequate.** Unlike mainstream Medicaid managed care, or even Medicare Advantage, the Phase One MLTC population to be enrolled in FIDA plans not only have, by definition, chronic health conditions, but conditions so severe that they require LTSS. Their primary care physicians will include not only internal medicine or geriatrics specialists but also cardiologists, pulmonologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, orthopedists, and many other specialties. It is critical that there be a maximum patient-to-provider ratio as exists in Medicaid managed care. And with involvement of stakeholders, **New York should determine which services are most needed and most accessed by dually eligible New Yorkers and establish network requirements, which may vary by specialty or service, taking into account other factors such as:**
 - i. Providers must be accepting new FIDA beneficiaries;**
 - ii. State should set a maximum patient load or patient to provider ratio, which may vary based on specialty.** Even if the FIDA plan has two providers available within 30 miles or 30 minutes for each plan service, if a large number of FIDA beneficiaries live within a particular geographic area this number may not suffice. This safeguard will also help FIDA plans achieve the proposed scheduling times and wait times.

- iii. A number -- to be determined -- of every provider must meet accessibility standards established by the ADA, and have capacity to serve members with limited English proficiency (LEP) or unique health care needs.
 - iv. As proposed, all providers must accept the FIDA plan payment, regardless of whether they normally accept Medicare or Medicaid.
- b. The state must conduct a *readiness review* that examines all of the above criteria using a methodology and target measures that have been developed in a transparent stakeholder process—before plans are permitted to “go live.”
- c. We support the proposal’s allowance of access to out-of-network providers at no cost, if the plan’s network is unable to meet network adequacy requirements, but the State must clarify when and how and by whom it is determined that the plan is in or out of compliance. **Given the urgent need for time-sensitive care, the beneficiary must be able to go out-of-network without any delay.** Moreover, we propose that members also have the ability to immediately disenroll from the plan and return to fee-for-service Medicaid and Medicare or another FIDA plan.
- d. **The State must specify how the FIDA plans will be required to monitor their network capacity.** Providers list must be updated at a specified frequency and be made publicly available on the plans’ websites, by mail, from the broker, and in other ways. The State must also specify that the plans must determine at regular specified intervals if providers are accepting new patients or have long wait times, and make this information available to beneficiaries in specified ways. Plans must make clear who a beneficiary can contact if they have network adequacy problem. The State must also do monitoring to verify the plan’s internal capacity monitoring.
- e. Because many FIDA enrollees will have received their Medicare and Medicaid without network restrictions, it is important that as beneficiaries enter into FIDA plans they are provided with a transition period during which they can access out of network providers without penalty. **We recommend beneficiaries have a six month transition period, not the proposed 60 day period.** Individuals should also be able to extend this period for good cause – if, for example, there is no safe transition to in-network providers possible.

The State must clarify that the FIDA plan is prohibited from applying new utilization management such as prior authorization criteria, step therapy, quantity/frequency limits, medical necessity limitations, etc. during the transition period. For example, if a patient has a prescription that is not in the drug formulary for a participating plan, there must be a mechanism for the new plan to know of previous treatment plans in order to continue them, as was done during the carve-in of the Medicaid pharmacy benefit.

Continuity of treatment should apply to all current treatment plans, and the continuity protection should not be broken because of the end of an authorization period for an on-going service. For example, if a beneficiary was receiving personal care from an MLTC plan that was re-

authorized every 6 months, the authorization in place at the beginning of a 6-month transition period would clearly expire in mid-transition period; that expiration should not end the continuity requirement if, in the physician or clinician's opinion, a reauthorization is part of the same treatment. The same should apply to any treatment addition or change that is a reasonable, foreseeable or necessary part of a current treatment plan.

3) Plan payment and performance measures and outcomes

New York's proposal seeks to pursue a capitation model that would pay FIDA plans a risk adjusted per-member-per-month capitated payment in an amount to be determined by DOH and CMS. We are pleased that the State acknowledges the need to provide payments to plans that account for the particularized needs of the plan members. More specifically, we support the FIDA proposal's anticipation of utilizing risk corridors or an alternative reinsurance mechanism to guard against cherry picking.

Payment rates should incentivize best practices. For example, it is vital that plan reimbursements and/or capitation rates, including bonuses and incentives, agreed upon by CMS and DOH incentivize community based care over institutionalized and nursing home care. We refer the State to consumer advocate proposals to incentivize community based care that were submitted on March 23, 2012, which are posted at <http://wnylc.com/health/download/304/>. Additionally, FIDA plan payment rates, particularly in the early years, should compensate plans for successfully achieving full Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, including architectural changes, purchase of accessible equipment, and training for FIDA plan personnel, providers, and vendors. California's Section 1115 Comprehensive Demonstration Project Waiver includes a provision requiring that plans and providers must be trained in cultural competency to better serve individuals living with disabilities—a similar provision should be included in New York's model.

We appreciate New York's interest in incentivizing high quality care by proposing additional payments be made to FIDA plans that have high *performance measures*. Any measures the State develops should account for the specifics of the dually eligible population. Quality measures and performance ratings applied to Medicaid managed care plans for younger and non-disabled adults are not appropriate markers for low income older and disabled adults. New York should consult with organizations that have developed quality measures specifically for this population when developing its performance measures. For example, it should consider adoption of the NIDRR-funded "Assessment of Health Plans and Providers by People with Activity Limitations" instrument based on the Medicaid CAHPS instrument but with phrasing and content areas that are more appropriate to adults with activities limitations or a similar instrument. Data collection should include examination of whether there are disparities in access and outcomes based upon disability, gender, race/ethnicity or other factors. California's demonstration project includes a provision stating that it will adopt a version of CAHPS designed specifically to reflect the concerns of participants with disabilities. New York should also consult with CMS, as CMS works to further refine its Star ratings program and implement its Medicare Advantage quality bonus payment system. We ask that New York make clear that FIDA plans will not

participate in the Federal quality bonus payment program; FIDA plans do not need to receive quality payments from both New York and the Federal government.

The potential Improvement Targets listed by the State as expected Outcomes, which would correlate to performance measures, are not sufficient. (p. 21). They must be expanded to include targets relating to preventing institutionalization, preventing falls and other accidents, maintaining and improving the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living, and other measures that should be developed with stakeholder involvement.

The State's plan indicates that FIDA plans will be required to cover all Medicaid and Medicare services, including long term care services and supports and Medicare prescription drug benefits, and other additional services not presently covered by either program.⁴ The State has already explicitly listed some of these additional services like transition (moving) assistance. We applaud this effort. **We also recommend that FIDA plans also include coverage for certain services and supports that are not explicitly listed as expanded services, Medicare services, or Medicaid services, but facilitate care coordination and the health of the beneficiary.** For example, blenders are not covered durable medical equipment under either the Medicare or Medicaid program; however, plan coverage of a blender used during a covered home health visit to blend food for a beneficiary who is unable to consume solid foods supports the beneficiary's holistic plan of care and ability to remain in the community. New York need not provide a comprehensive of all possible examples of these items and services, but should provide for an exceptions process that would allow for FIDA plan coverage of these items and services.

FIDA plans should also be required to develop *electronic medical records* so that all network providers have access to records for every member. This will require funding to develop the infrastructure. Without this capacity, full care coordination will not be possible.

Finally, actuarial support provided by external consultants must be transparent. In order to ensure that community based care is incentivized by the payment rates access to this work and this process is critical. **A minimum medical loss ratio calculation (MLR) should be adopted to ensure that the State's money is spent on providing care to dually eligible New Yorkers, and not the enrichment of plan employees or investors.** We recommend that a standard be adopted that is at least as stringent as the 85% MLR that will apply to Medicare Advantage plans in 2013. Whether or not a minimum MLR is adopted, cost data—as mentioned above—must be reported.

4) Stakeholder engagement – Task Forces Needed

We are disappointed by New York's stakeholder engagement process. The State notes it has been conducting a weekly conference call with advocates and other stakeholders to discuss the managed long term care carve-in. While this call has been an important forum for receiving information about implementation and for asking questions about that program, it has not enabled meaningful discussion of the FIDA proposal. The State does not take roll calls on the managed long term care conference calls.

⁴ Medicare hospice services, out of network family planning services, directly observed therapy for TB, and methadone maintenance treatment are explicitly exempted from these covered services.

Thus the State has no record of who is participating, and is unable to provide for meaningful discussion or comments between participants.

Most importantly, the stakeholder calls are no substitute for working task forces, which California and Massachusetts have convened to engage stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue to develop key components of the dual programs. **We recommend that New York develop similar task forces to engage stakeholders as the duals demonstration process moves forward.** While consumer advocacy groups have addressed written comments to DOH on more than one occasion, there has been no written response indicating how the comments were perceived or whether they were in any way incorporated into program design. These task forces should be targeted to address specific concerns outlined in these comments including but not limited to: Quality Assurance; Monitoring and Oversight; Finance and Incentives, Enrollment, and Consumer Communication and Outreach. Going forward, the State proposes quarterly stakeholder meetings. We believe this is insufficient. Because beneficiaries, their family members, and advocates should be involved in the development of the FIDA plans, marketing rules, notifications, and other substantive areas, regular, structured communication will be necessary. A weekly call similar to the managed long term care call may be an appropriate tool for providing updates to advocates, insurers, providers and other stakeholders, but an alternative mechanism will be needed to ensure meaningful dialogue and elicit thoughtful input. It will also be important for stakeholders to be apprised of the process for translating input into program improvements.

The CMS Standards and Conditions reference several other mechanisms for ongoing and meaningful stakeholder engagement, such as workgroups, focus groups and advisory committees. As mentioned we recommend that in addition to providing regular updates, New York should follow the example of Massachusetts and California, both of which have employed a set of issue specific task forces to develop input on the challenges presented by an integrated model of care for dual eligibles. New York should build upon its experience with the Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Review Panel and the Work Groups utilized by the Medicaid Redesign Team. **The task forces for the Dual Demonstration should be staffed sufficiently to ensure meaningful development of an overall mission and concrete objectives at the outset.** Staffing should also allow for detailed program updates to ensure level setting at each meeting. Written materials should accompany oral presentations, and assistance should be provided in interpreting data on program performance and developing recommendations. Finally, task force members should understand the process the State will use for translating their input into program improvements.

Given that many of the details that are lacking in the State's initial proposal will be outlined in the memorandum of understandings (MOUs) between New York and CMS, it is imperative that the process for stakeholder input be formalized in time to influence the MOU process. Draft MOU provisions should be posted publicly, and the State should provide a period for beneficiaries, advocates, and other stakeholders, as well as the aforementioned task members, to issue comments on draft MOUs.

5) Beneficiary Engagement

We are very concerned about the State's outreach to beneficiaries and their families during the development phase of the proposal. No matter the level of participation or the breadth of the discussion, engagement of eight beneficiaries is in no way meaningful, particularly in the context of a proposed demonstration that would involve more than 60 percent of dually eligible New Yorkers.

To engage beneficiaries in program design in a meaningful way, we recommend localized town hall meetings where beneficiaries and family members can ask questions and raise concerns. Outreach must be targeted to reach the dual eligible beneficiaries. We recommend working through community based organizations already engaging with duals, such as independent living centers, HIICAP agencies, managed long term care plans, and other providers. Texas is currently engaging the provider community through similar outreach efforts as it expands STAR and STAR+PLUS Medicaid managed care programs. New York still has the opportunity to conduct meaningful beneficiary outreach and engagement in program design during the development of the MOU and plan contracts.

As mentioned earlier, we are pleased that the State proposes to require plans to form Participant Advisory Committees (PACs). Quarterly meetings of PACs are a promising mechanism for the plans to share information about grievances and appeals and quality assurance with members and learn about member concerns. **However, as discussed previously, we feel it is imperative that the plans share the information aired at PAC meetings with DOH, that DOH periodically attend the meetings, and that DOH summarize the reports it receives for publication.** While we are pleased to see that the State plans to conduct quality surveys on all participants annually, written surveys will be of limited value with the dual eligible population. In order to ensure unbiased participant feedback, the alternative mechanisms envisioned in the proposal such as PACs and participant feedback sessions should not be left entirely to the plans.

We are also pleased that the State intends to provide updates and information to the eligible population prior to enrollment through the use of notices and other written and electronic communications. As aforementioned, we believe it is critical that the State spearhead the development of beneficiary notices and other communications, and that notices are developed with input from beneficiaries and their advocates. Materials must clearly explain that LTSS services are only available in certain types of plans, and caution individuals about the consequences of enrolling in plans that do not include LTSS, since Medicaid LTSS will no longer be available on a FFS basis. After enrollment, beneficiaries should be educated about the opportunity to participate meaningfully in service assessments and construction of care management teams, and all plans should facilitate access to consumer directed services.

We recommend that New York set aside a portion of its demonstration implementation monies for beneficiary engagement, including a centralized process for developing accessible and effective consumer communications, and meaningful partnerships with community based providers and advocates who can assist with outreach and engagement. Even with a more robust beneficiary engagement plan, it will be difficult for the State and its enrollment broker to educate and counsel all 460,000 beneficiaries. Finally, those charged with engaging the population must have meaningful information that will permit them to help beneficiaries distinguish among plans and select the ones that are right for them. The Department and the entity contracted to manage the newly established

facilitated enrollment program for older adults and people with disabilities should work with the community-based organizations, beneficiary advocates, providers to develop “choice” tools that are tailored to the population and its concerns.

6) Scope of Services and Utilization controls, Appeal rights and grievances

As noted, New York’s FIDA proposal will require FIDA plans to cover all Medicare and Medicaid covered services and additional services not presently covered by either program. **In our experience, access to health services is controlled by utilization management and service restrictions like prior authorization or medication step therapy. We recommend that the State allow for a limited utilization of these measures.** In our experience these tools often cause undue delay in receiving a needed service or medication and force beneficiaries into the appeals process unnecessarily. Moreover, given the FIDA proposal’s goal of seamless care coordination between providers, beneficiaries, and the FIDA plans, any question about utilization should be resolved by the provider and the FIDA plan on an individual basis, rather than placing blanket stops on certain services for all FIDA beneficiaries.

New York’s proposed key elements of the FIDA appeals process should be applauded: single notices, aid continuing for both Medicaid and Medicare benefits pending appeals, and the usage of the most beneficiary friendly timelines are important protections for beneficiaries. However, more concrete guidance regarding each of these and other elements of the appeals process is needed.

- a. The State must provide a clear definition of medical necessity.** The contracts and guidance must make clear that plans must provide services using the Medicaid definition of “medical necessity,” which is generally more expansive than Medicare, given that Medicaid is a program based on financial need while Medicare is not. Section 365-a of the Social Services Law defines “medical necessity” as:

“Medical assistance” shall mean payment of part or all of the cost of medically necessary medical, dental and remedial care, services and supplies, as authorized in this title or the regulations of the department, which are necessary to prevent, diagnose, correct or cure conditions in the person that cause acute suffering, endanger life, result in illness or infirmity, interfere with such person's capacity for normal activity, or threaten some significant handicap and which are furnished an eligible person in accordance with this title and the regulations of the department.

Two examples of services with divergent Medicaid and Medicare criteria are home health services and durable medical equipment (DME). Certified home health agencies commonly conflate the Medicare and Medicaid criteria and use the more restrictive Medicare definition, despite clarification from CMS that certain restrictive eligibility criteria for Medicare home health services do not apply for Medicaid services, for example.⁵ Similarly, Medicaid rules

⁵ See, e.g., HCFA Olmstead Update No. 3, HCFA letter to State Medicaid Directors, July 25, 2000 (stating “The ‘homebound’ requirement is a Medicare requirement that does not apply to the Medicaid program.”), posted at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/smdl/downloads/smd072500b.pdf>.

prohibit a managed care plan from denying or discouraging a member from submitting a prior approval request for a particular type of medical equipment or device by stating that the requested device does not meet the definition of Durable Medical Equipment (DME), or that the item is "not covered." Since a state Medicaid agency is not permitted to maintain an "exclusive list" of covered DME, there must always be an opportunity to show that the item meets the DME definition.⁶

- b. As stated above, the right to a hearing before Medicaid benefits are reduced or terminated, which entails "aid continuing" pending the hearing, is a fundamental due process right. **We are encouraged that the proposal includes this right to aid continuing, but ask the State to confirm that this right to continued benefits pending appeal exists regardless of whether the plan's reduction or termination of a service is at the end of an "authorization period" for that service.** The State recently proposed to amend state regulations governing Medicaid managed care appeals, which would deny the right of aid continuing if the plan's proposed service reduction or termination coincides with the end of an "authorization period." See 18 NYCRR 360-10.8(e)(2) (currently in effect as an emergency regulation). By allowing beneficiaries to continue to access long-term care, behavioral health services or other long-term services for chronic conditions during an appeal, New York State will help ensure that this low income population, whose members cannot pay for their care out of pocket, will not be forced to forgo care or be left at risk without necessary long-term care.⁷ Without this protection, the aid continuing right is essentially nonexistent in the context of service terminations or reductions. **We disagree with the recommendation of the Medicare and Medicaid Coordination Office (MMCO), which would result in Medicare benefits being terminated after the initial plan-level determination.**⁸ This distinction is arbitrary. Moreover, our experience in Medicare Part D is that the overall plan reversal rate at the Independent Review level is approximately 65 percent.⁹ Given this high rate of plan reversal at the Independent Review level, it would unfairly penalize beneficiaries to cut off aid after the initial plan decision. Furthermore, differences in aid continuing between Medicare and Medicaid benefits could create confusion and interfere with the stated goal of seamless care provision, as outlined below.
- c. Notice content must comport with longstanding state and federal Medicaid requirements. **Notices must include the effective date of the action, explicit reasons for the action, citations**

⁶ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Letter to State Medicaid Directors (Sept. 4, 1998), available at www.cms.hhs.gov/states/letters/smd90498.asp.

⁷ As a related matter, authorization periods should be realistic. When a beneficiary has a permanent disabling condition that requires ongoing treatment of a certain type, the authorization period should be annual or six-months, not 90 days, and, for other services, the treating provider should be able to certify a longer authorization period if appropriate. However reasonable the length of the authorization period may be, we reiterate that individuals must be entitled to "aid continuing" if the plan seeks to terminate or reduce long-term services at the end of an authorization period.

⁸ CMS, Letter to Organizations Interested in Offering Capitated Financial Alignment Demonstration Plans (Jan. 25 2012), available at: http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Documents/Duals/Final_CMS_Plan_Guidance.pdf

⁹ CMS Fact Sheet Part D Reconsideration Appeals Data, Plan Year 2009, available at: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/Medicare/Appeals-and-Grievances/MedPrescriptDrugApplGriev/Reconsiderations.html>

to specific regulations, web addresses and phone numbers of the insurer, the independent adjudicator, the Ombudsman's Office, and the State grievance system, along with clear instruction on how to appeal the denial and to request an expedited appeal. Moreover, any oral denial of a particular item or service must be followed up with a written formal denial within 48 hours. This notification must be clear, with the reason the service or item is being denied concisely explained on the first page.

- d. A unified appeals process should provide beneficiaries with the more protective due process provisions from the Medicare and Medicaid programs. **The appeals process should lay out a clear appeals pathway for beneficiaries to follow regardless of whether the particularized services are covered by Medicare or Medicaid.** Beneficiaries should not be asked to choose an appeals pathway or to decide whether the service is Medicare or Medicaid covered and then pursue the appropriate Federal or State process. **In any appeals process, it is critical that the beneficiary have no wrong door to exercising appeal rights.**

All FIDA plan internal appeals processes should be identical and New York State should regulate the structure. This will allow for the dissemination of clear and concise information and education about how appeals work for FIDA beneficiaries, rather than referring beneficiaries to their particular FIDA plan. Moreover, it will guard against multiple levels of internal insurer appeals. Insurers should have one bite at the apple before the appeal proceeds to an independent adjudicator. Beneficiaries must be able to contact the plan appeals department and the independent adjudicator.

At all level of appeals the adjudicator should conduct proactive outreach to providers to collect any information that is missing from the beneficiaries appeal or is needed to make a determination of medical necessity. The independent reviewer in the Medicare Part D program conducts this type of outreach. In our experience this outreach guards against rubber stamped denials due to a lack of information. This proactive outreach and coordination seems in keeping with the goals of the FIDA demonstration and should be adopted in New York's FIDA proposal.

- e. **We recommend that FIDA enrollees have immediate access to both an internal FIDA plan appeals process and an in person Medicaid fair hearing,** as Medicaid beneficiaries have now. Fair Hearings should be in person as a default, but beneficiaries should have the ability to request a telephonic or video hearing if that is their preference. Homebound beneficiaries should be afforded the rights outlined in *Varshavsky v. Perales*, including the right to a home hearing if they lose a telephone or representative hearing.
- f. **The right to conference, which currently exists in the Medicaid fair hearing process, should be preserved in the new FIDA appeals structure.**
- g. If FIDA participants will appeal any denied item or service through the State Medicaid appeals channels, which we recommend, State staff will need training and education on Medicare covered services and the Medicare coverage rules that will apply to FIDA plans. State Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) lack practical experience with the Medicare program. **New**

York's FIDA proposal must explicitly account for the needed training and any additional staffing that may be needed to facilitate this training.

- h. There must also be remedies for beneficiaries who do not have a hearing scheduled timely or do not receive a timely decision. **We recommend lapsed decision timelines trigger a favorable decision for the beneficiary or, at minimum, a delayed plan decision should automatically be forwarded to the next level of appeal.** Presently, in both Medicare and Medicaid, despite firm rules regarding timely decisions, fair hearing requests and request for review by the Medicare Appeals Council extend far beyond their allotted timeline. Presently, Medicaid recipients are being forced to wait months before non-home care hearings are even scheduled. New York must hire appropriate staff to ensure timely decisions and provide concrete remedies for beneficiaries whose decision time has lapsed. Plans could be allowed some filing deadline flexibility but only if the beneficiary is helped, not harmed by this flexibility. Plans must afford members their due process right to access to documents from their medical record to prepare for a hearing, providing a simple way of requesting these documents.
- i. **Just as aid continuing rights are essential to ensure that this vulnerable population does not go without needed care, beneficiaries should have clear access to an expedited review process for medically urgent care.** This could be modeled after the Medicare process, which allows for expedited appeals if a beneficiary's health or life could be endangered by waiting for the regular review timeline. Federal Medicaid regulations also allow for expedited appeals if delay could "jeopardize...the ability to attain, maintain, or regain maximum function." 42 C.F.R. § 438.410(a). Although MMCO has recommended following the 72 hour expedited appeal process in the Medicare Part C program, we recommend the 24 hour timeline governing the initial level of appeal in Medicare Part D.¹⁰ As mentioned above, the current backlog in New York fair hearing requests can make the scheduling of a truly expedited hearing impossible; we reemphasize the need to hire and train the appropriate staff to guard against this outcome.
- j. **Appeals should be triggered immediately when a service or benefit is denied.** Currently, Medicare Part D beneficiaries who are denied a medication at the pharmacy must still take multiple steps to get a plan determination in order to appeal the denial, leading to potentially harmful delays.
- k. **We strongly disagree with the MMCO recommendation that the Part D appeal standards remain the same in the demonstration plans; we recommend that the FIDA appeals process for denied medication differ substantially from Medicare Part D.** The Part D process, as it currently exists, causes many beneficiaries to experience significant delays in access and suffer negative consequences to their health. As mentioned, in the current appeals standards a denial at the pharmacy counter triggers no due process rights, instead, a beneficiary must go to his or her prescribing physician and request written support to request a coverage determination. Counterintuitively, the physician's prescription does not constitute written support. At this

¹⁰ CMS, Letter to Organizations Interested in Offering Capitated Financial Alignment Demonstration Plans

point, beneficiaries have already seen their doctor, been prescribed a medication, and brought the prescription to the pharmacy, only to find that they can neither obtain their needed medication nor immediately initiate the appeals process. This burdensome and opaque appeals process is weighed down by excessive paperwork, administrative error, and severely lacks in transparency. Furthermore, beneficiaries, their doctors, and their pharmacists are often unaware of how to challenge the plan's decision. As a result, many bypass the formal appeals process entirely, simply leaving the pharmacy empty-handed and accepting the resulting consequences to their health or, if they can afford to, paying the full cost of the drug out of pocket. For those beneficiaries who do request a coverage determination, it is only after this coverage determination is made that the beneficiary has any appeal rights. However, rather than appealing to an independent entity, the beneficiary once again makes an appeal to the plan. This Byzantine process allows the plan has three bites at the appeal: the decision at pharmacy counter, the coverage determination and the coverage redetermination. In our experience, this onerous process only deters beneficiaries from pursuing an appeal and confuses beneficiaries, providers and pharmacists. The Part D appeals process is riddled with deficiencies and adoption of the current process for FIDA beneficiaries is ill advised.

7) Monitoring and Oversight

The State indicates that it is currently capable of monitoring the cost, quality and utilization of managed care insurance plans. We are concerned, however, about the proposal's lack of detail in this area, and question whether 10 DOH staff will be sufficient to conduct meaningful monitoring and oversight. Monitoring and oversight are critical in order to inform program modifications and corrective actions; identify and address health disparities; and educate enrollees so that potential barriers to accessing needed care can be avoided through careful and informed choice of plans. **In a three-way contract between DOH, CMS and plans, both CMS and DOH should have the authority to issue corrective action plans, impose enrollment and marketing sanctions, levy monetary penalties and if necessary, terminate plan contracts.** Both federal and state investigative bodies should have the authority to monitor and investigate the model.

Even with federal assistance in monitoring the model, DOH will need significant staff resources to arrive upon appropriate data measures for a new initiative such as FIDA, institute the procedures for collecting the data, and analyze and summarize the results for the public. In terms of identifying the appropriate access and quality matrix for a program such as FIDA, it is imperative that the State not rely exclusively on familiar clinical measures such as avoidable hospitalizations, emergency room use and drug interactions. **Data will also be needed on measures such as:**

- ***Positive social outcomes achieved. Social outcome measures*** include satisfaction with one's ability to participate in the community, employment, pursuit of higher education and other indications of independence;
- ***Broad provider networks.*** Duals will need both acute and long-term care from a wide array of specialists and specialized facilities that may not be represented adequately or at all in existing

provider networks – accommodations, wait and travel times must be closely monitored and plan provider lists must be kept updated and publicly available;

- **Care integration and coordination.** The State will need to verify and assess co-location, integrated treatment plans and the effectiveness of multi-disciplinary teams;
- **Successful beneficiary engagement.** The State must confirm that communications are clear, accurate and effective, ideally through standardization and central development – and that plan outreach and engagement activities are meaningful -, ideally through participation in PAC meetings and collection and publication of PAC reports;
- **Service utilization & outcomes.** Widely used quality measure sets do not adequately target the needs of dually eligible beneficiaries- our previous comments have suggested that both social outcomes and tailored clinical measures for treatment of diseases prevalent to the target population are critical to incorporate

It is promising that the DOH is presently receiving Medicare fee-for-service data from CMS, it will be important for the department to build expertise in analyzing Medicare data. The department should also seek information from Medicare Advantage plans operating in the service area.

We also applaud New York for proposing appointment standard requirements and maximum wait times; however, we find the proposal short on critical details about the reporting and oversight of these metrics. Monitoring cannot be the sole responsibility of beneficiaries and their advocates; the State and CMS should have an active role in collecting these data points. We recommend periodic “secret shopper” surveys to audit provider availability and compliance with the access metrics specified in the proposal.

The Ombudsman will be an important vehicle for collecting anecdotal case stories of excessive wait times as well as service denials, plan treatment of prior authorization requests from providers, and the rate of plan decisions being overturned on independent appeal. **Each plan should be required to appoint a liaison to work with the Ombudsman to resolve barriers to services encountered by their members. In addition, New York should implement a complaint tracking module similar to that utilized by CMS to help resolve individual problems and identify systemic issues and problems.**

Once the appropriate measures are described and the data collected, it must be analyzed and summarized. DOH must stratify the data by race, ethnicity, primary language, disability and gender in order to identify and address disparities in access and outcomes. DOH must also make information that describes plan performance publicly available in plain language. **Synthesized data should be published in the form of simple comparison charts, report cards or star ratings for beneficiaries and their families.**

The task force structure discussed earlier in these comments will provide an important layer of oversight by soliciting and receiving stakeholder input. **Actual beneficiaries and their advocates must be task force members and have the opportunity to provide input on their group’s agenda.** The task force

should receive data relevant to their issue area and assistance with translating the data into recommendations for program improvement. It is imperative that the State moves away from reliance on beneficiaries as the primary reporting mechanism. In future iterations of the proposal we hope to see the State delineate relevant data measures in more detail and explicitly outline how that data will be collected, analyzed, publicized and acted upon.

8) Access for people with disabilities

The “Rights and Responsibilities” section of the Draft Proposal makes mention of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and gives a couple of examples of specific reasonable accommodations, blending them with other things that it calls “rights.” As outlined in earlier sections, New York’s FIDA proposal lacks critical details throughout its draft proposal regarding how it will ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from managed care for dually eligible New Yorkers, whether it be in network adequacy and access, or stakeholder engagement and beneficiary protections, key metrics, or infrastructure and implementation.

The current proposal confines the discussion of obligations pursuant to federal civil rights law to “rights and responsibilities of enrollees. When it gives examples it appears to suggest that rights apply only to enrollees with physical disabilities or hearing or vision-related disabilities. **The proposal should indicate that the enumerate rights apply to individuals with all disabilities, including cognitive or intellectual disabilities and psychiatric disabilities.** ADA obligations apply to program applicants as well as plan enrollees. The State and FIDA plans must address the obligation to achieve equal access more broadly. They must show that they will fulfill their obligation to modify policies, practices and procedures. They must demonstrate a more thorough understanding of reasonable accommodations.

The ADA and federal policy guidance include concepts such as “equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and services,” and “equal access.” **The State should consider what it must do to ensure equal access for people with disabilities throughout the design of the program—beyond including these concepts in its discussion of rights and responsibilities. It must give examples in its proposal that communicate understanding of the implications of these concepts as well as the concepts of reasonable accommodation.** For example, to ensure “equal access,” might be illustrated by indicating that the State will use quality metrics modified to reflect the health needs and concerns of people with disabilities.

Furthermore, the State should demonstrate that it understands that it, FIDA plans and providers have an obligation to modify any policies, practices and procedures that deny equal access to persons with disabilities. Modification may be required to prevent discrimination, for example, a policy that requires enrollees to use a FIDA network vendor even though the vendor’s facility is not accessible may be denying individuals with disabilities an opportunity to obtain an equal benefit to those without disabilities.

The State, FIDA plans and providers are required to make reasonable accommodations and should provide examples of these—indicating that the examples are not exclusive. Information about the ADA and its requirements must be made available to applicants as well as plan participants—not only once

but on a continuing basis. **The notice that one is entitled to a reasonable accommodation should include language indicating who is covered (referencing ADLs and IADLs) and that help is available in very precise terms.** It should give notice of the right to file an ADA grievance and how to do so.

Accommodations can include providing readers, help filling out forms, repeated explanations and extra appointment time to discuss health issues, assistance with administrative procedures like arranging for referrals, flexibility in appointment scheduling, collecting documents or accepting alternate documentation, making phone calls on an individual's behalf, extra appointment time for dressing and undressing, video phone access, etc. these are of course, in addition to requirements related to physical plant and communications technology or interpreter access.

Finally, it is telling that in the non-discrimination provision of the "Rights and Responsibilities" section the draft proposal describes classes of enrollees that must be free of discrimination in accessing care—except for people with disabilities.

In summary, we the undersigned commend the Department of Health for considering some of the critical elements that will ultimately help minimize the risks to dual eligible New Yorkers. However, as outlined above there are many elements of this proposal that need further definition, revision, and explanation before this proposal is submitted to CMS. **We recommend that New York State take more than the currently proposed six days to review, consider, and incorporate the various stakeholder comments and concerns before submitting its revised draft.** Although this would extend the proposal's submission timeline, it would afford the State with an opportunity to think through and address some of the more serious concerns outlined in these comments and the comments of other beneficiary advocates.

Finally, we must underscore our concern about the timeline and scope of enrollment for the dually eligible beneficiaries beginning in January of 2014. We appreciate the need to move the demonstration along quickly, however, given the frailty of this population, we strongly caution the State against allowing enrollment before it can assure CMS, dually eligible New Yorkers, and their advocates that integrated care entities with the expertise to care for complex needs are in fact able to meet the needs of the members they will serve.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and would be happy to talk with you further as your office continues its review; should you have any questions regarding these comments you may contact Doug Goggin-Callahan at dgoggin-callahan@medicarerights.org or any of the undersigned signatories.

Sincerely,


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On behalf of the following organizations:

A Reflection of You Counseling & Support Services, LLC
Access to Independence of Cortland County
Bridges for Brian Injuries, Inc.
Bronx Independent Living Services
Brooklyn Center for Independence
Care America
Catskill Center for Independence
Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State
Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State
Disabled In Action of Metropolitan NY
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
Health Care for All New York (HCFANY)
Independent Living, Inc.
Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley
Interim Healthcare of Greater NY and Rochester, Inc
JASA/Legal Services for the Elderly in Queens

Legal Services NYC-Bronx
Long Island Center for Independent Living
Long Term Care Community Coalition
Medicaid Matters New York (MMNY)
New Beginnings Home Care, Inc.
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS)
New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage
North Country Center for Independence
Options for Independence
Putnam Independent Living Services
Regional Center for Independent Living
Resource Living for Accessible Living
Robynwood Home Agency
Rockland Independent Living Center
Southern Adirondack Independent Living Center
Southern Tier Independence Center
The Alliance of TBI & NHTD Waiver Providers
Wheels of Progress
Westchester Disabled on the Move
Westchester Independent Living Center
504 Democratic Club

Cc: Melanie Bella, Director, Medicare-Medicaid Coordination Office (MMCO)