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Wednesday, November 09, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Bldg  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
United States Senate  
361-A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner  
United States House of Representatives  
1011 Longworth House Office Bldg  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
H232 Capital Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Boehner, Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of our nation's older adults and people with disabilities, the following organizations urge Congress to extend the Qualifying Individual (QI) program for 2012. Despite its clear benefit to thousands of Medicare beneficiaries, the Qualifying Individual (QI) program is currently set to expire on December 31, 2011.

Enacted as part of the Balanced Budget Act in 1997, QI assists older adults and persons with disabilities struggling to afford rising healthcare costs. Nationally, QI relieves the costs of monthly Part B premiums for more than 380,000 low-income people with Medicare. QI also automatically enrolls these individuals in the Low-Income Subsidy, also known as "Extra Help"—a federal program that significantly lowers Part D copay, premium, and deductible costs.

The program saves enrollees up to \$1,385 in annual Part B premiums and, through Extra Help, almost \$4,000 in drug costs—income that QI-1 recipients can use toward food, housing, and other basic living expenses.<sup>1</sup> Without QI, many of these individuals may be forced to choose between these necessities and the cost of drugs or medical care. For older adults and persons with disabilities—many of whom are vulnerable to an increasingly complex, precarious healthcare system — QI provides greater financial stability and peace of mind.

In addition to extending QI for 2012, we encourage Congress to take action to further build on the program's success by making the program permanent, removing the asset test nationally, and raising the program's income threshold from its current limit of 135% of the Federal Poverty Level to 150%. As a result, thousands more older Americans and people with disabilities will be able to utilize this program's proven ability to alleviate some of the substantial financial burdens associated with Medicare.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Social Security Administration, states, and countless consumer groups have invested considerable time and resources in ensuring that QI-eligible

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<sup>1</sup> \$115.40 in Part B premiums per month, multiplied by 12 months;  
<http://www.ncoa.org/assets/files/pdf/Implications-of-Block-Grants-for-Seniors-and-People-with-Disabilities.pdf>

individuals are enrolled in the program because of the importance of QI to the Medicare population. Your active support of this program will facilitate these efforts.

We look forward to working with you to guarantee this the future of this program and ensuring other important protections for low-income people with Medicare.

Sincerely,

Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups  
Florida CHAIN  
Kansas Health Consumer Coalition  
Maine Coast Memorial Hospital  
Maine Legal Services for the Elderly  
Medicare Rights Center  
Social Service Coordinators  
Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging  
United Cerebral Palsy of South East Wisconsin