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September 12, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling  
United States House of Representatives  
129 Cannon HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Murray, Representative Hensarling and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction,

As you begin to take on the difficult task of forging an agreement to reduce the nation's deficit, I would like to offer the Medicare Rights Center as a resource for information about Medicare, and particularly about the actual experience people with Medicare have with the program.

We urge you to seek out, and listen carefully to, the voices of people with Medicare—not just to those of economists, policymakers and health care experts—as you deliberate over proposals that would alter Medicare. We understand the pressure to focus on the numbers and the fiscal impact of your work, but through our work directly with Medicare beneficiaries, we see first hand the struggles that this population and their caregivers, including their families and friends, face as their health care needs grow.

These experiences inform our policy work and are reflected in our attached report, "Voices of Medicare." This report features stories from across the nation from actual people with Medicare and the professionals who help them, collected as responses to the question "What do you like about Medicare?" This collection of Medicare voices serves as a strong testament to the importance of Medicare for each one of these people and all of their fellow citizens. What becomes clear is that Medicare is a vital source of health and financial security.

Of specific concern to the Medicare Rights Center are changes to Medicare and Medicaid that would reduce government spending by shifting costs to people with Medicare or proposals that would limit coverage for Medicare beneficiaries. Many of these proposals save money not only through the direct increase of costs borne by beneficiaries, but also through the subsequent drop in utilization that will occur because Medicare beneficiaries will not seek care that has become unaffordable. Many people with Medicare live on limited incomes. Half of these individuals have incomes below \$22,000 dollars per year, and people with Medicare already spend on average 15 percent of their incomes on health care—three times as much as the non-Medicare population. But while incomes are stretched thin, the need for care is high: nearly half of all Medicare beneficiaries have three or more chronic conditions.

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These concerns are the concerns of the people we represent. We hope we can work together to ensure that deficit reduction is achieved in a balanced way and preserves the basic quality of life that people with Medicare and all Americans deserve. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or requests for more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" and last name "Baker" clearly distinguishable.

Joe Baker  
President