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October 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 House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

On behalf of the Medicare Rights Center, a national nonprofit organization working to help people with Medicare access high-quality, affordable health care, I attach a petition signed by 19,531 individuals, with all 50 states represented. The overwhelming response to this petition—signatures were collected in under two weeks—reflects what has been found repeatedly in public polls: Americans highly value the current Medicare program and are keenly aware that the program provides them with financial security and access to life-saving care. Those who signed this petition believe you should protect Medicare from cuts to benefits that would shift costs to beneficiaries and their families.

Many of the petition signers elaborated on their position in their own words, including Ms. R from Albuquerque, New Mexico:

“Medicare recipients have paid for this benefit all their working lives. It is not a give-away; it is something we taxpayers have earned. Medicare is not broke or broken. It is far more efficient at delivering quality care than private insurance companies.”

As Ms. R so eloquently points out, Medicare is not the problem; the program has in fact done a good job of controlling costs. Over the past decade, Medicare spending per enrollee has grown more slowly than private health insurance spending. From 2002 to 2009, Medicare spending per enrollee grew by 4.6 percent compared to private health insurance, which grew by 6.7 percent for common benefits.

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Furthermore, people with Medicare are in a poor position to pay more for their health coverage and care, though their need is great. Half of people with Medicare have incomes below \$22,000 per year, and nearly half have three or more chronic conditions. People with Medicare already spend 15 percent of their incomes on health, three times as much as the non-Medicare population. Enacting policies that raise costs in an attempt to deter older and disabled Americans from accessing health care is dangerous and irresponsible; they will not only delay supposedly unnecessary care, but also medically necessary care that might help avert the progression of a medical condition and the need for more serious and costly interventions later in life.

As the support for this petition makes clear, the American public will not stand for cuts to Medicare. On behalf of the nearly 20,000 signers, we ask you to protect older Americans and people with disabilities now, and in the future.

You can view the petition online at www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/807/200/267/.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Joe Baker
President