

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Azar:

We write regarding the Administration's deeply troubling decision to reject establishing a general Special Enrollment Period (SEP) amidst the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>1</sup> We ask the Coronavirus Task Force and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to immediately reconsider this decision and allow uninsured and underinsured Americans to have access to comprehensive coverage through HealthCare.gov during this health crisis.

It is critical that the federal government use every tool at its disposal to avoid putting Americans' lives and financial security needlessly at risk from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Affordable Care Act's (ACA) Marketplaces and associated financial assistance can serve a critical role in protecting people who need health coverage — now is the time to set aside this Administration's longstanding attacks on the ACA and put American families' needs first. Unfortunately, this Administration's actions, including expanding access to short-term limited duration junk plans, have repeatedly undermined the health and financial security of families, exposing more Americans to high medical bills.

The decision not to establish an SEP creates the potential for additional financial stress on American families and jeopardizes the health of our communities. Initial reports suggest that uninsured Americans receiving treatment for COVID-19 could face medical costs upwards of \$35,000.<sup>2</sup> Those who are uninsured and otherwise struggling to navigate these challenging times may avoid seeking medical treatment altogether as a result. Not allowing an SEP through

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<sup>1</sup> Politico, *Trump rejects Obamacare special enrollment period amid pandemic* (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/31/trump-obamacare-coronavirus-157788>.

<sup>2</sup> TIME, *Total Cost of Her COVID-19 Treatment: \$34,927.43* (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://time.com/5806312/coronavirus-treatment-cost/>.

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HealthCare.gov is even more worrisome in states that have elected not to adopt the ACA's Medicaid expansion— as many lower-income Americans now at risk of losing their jobs as a result of COVID-19 will have no option to gain coverage.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Coronavirus Taskforce and HHS to reverse its decision regarding the SEP and allow Americans struggling during the coronavirus epidemic to have an opportunity to sign up for health coverage, which is key to protecting their health and the health of their communities.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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Richard E. Neal  
Chairman  
Committee on Ways and Means  
U.S. House of Representatives



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Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives



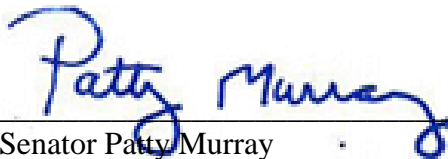
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Bobby Scott  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives



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Senator Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Finance  
United States Senate



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Senator Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
United States Senate