

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4802

July 12, 2012

Mr. A. Barry Rand  
CEO  
AARP  
601 E Street, Nw  
Washington, D.C. 20049-0001

Dear Mr. Rand,

I recently had the chance to meet with West Virginia AARP officials to discuss the new national AARP campaign called "You've Earned a Say." I appreciate AARP's efforts to support these vital programs for seniors in West Virginia and across our nation, and you have my continued support in this endeavor. However, I was deeply disappointed to learn that, as is all too often the case in discussions on entitlements, Medicaid is not being featured in AARP's campaign at all – let alone being given equal weight given its importance to seniors.

Seniors have indeed earned their say on programs of critical importance to them, and Medicaid is no exception – particularly in states like West Virginia, which has one of the highest proportions of seniors in the nation. In West Virginia, 164,000 seniors and people with disabilities rely on Medicaid – and these individuals account for 71% of all Medicaid spending in our state. I am hopeful that as we move forward, we can work together on ways to elevate the national discussion about the critical role Medicaid plays in covering seniors' health and long-term care needs.

As you know, Medicare enjoys broad support among the population. By contrast, Medicaid often finds itself at the receiving end of multiple attacks that stigmatize the nearly 70 million people it serves and seeks to paint them as undeserving of care. The Supreme Court's ruling on the Medicaid expansion will only serve to amplify the debate around Medicaid in the weeks and months to come. It is critical that Medicaid be part of the discussion about health and long-term care for seniors -- not because it is easy – but precisely because it is not.

During deficit reduction debates, Medicaid has been treated as a second-class citizen when compared to Medicare -- and as a result it is always the first to be attacked. Members of Congress, seniors and advocates have rightfully rallied in staunch defense of Medicare, but there has too often been an unsettling silence around Medicaid. This is despite the fact that Medicaid is enormously important to seniors, providing not only wraparound coverage and services for the lowest-income Medicare beneficiaries, but also as the nation's de-facto payer for long-term services and supports for millions of middle-class American families.

Medicaid has a much more critical and deeper role in the lives of seniors and middle class families than many people know. Here are just a few of the key benefits that seniors may not realize Medicaid provides to them:

- **Without Medicaid, seniors would have no safety net for significant health and long-term care needs.** While seniors and people with disabilities comprise one-quarter of Medicaid recipients, they account for two-thirds of its costs. Over 15% of seniors rely on Medicaid for health services – more than the number that fall into the Medicare prescription drug doughnut hole.
- **Medicaid also pays Medicare premiums and cost-sharing for low-income seniors,** who otherwise would not be able to afford out-of-pocket costs under Medicare.
- **In many states, Medicaid also pays for services that Medicare does not cover,** such as dental care, hearing aids and eyeglasses, for beneficiaries who cannot afford these services or supplemental coverage.
- **Medicaid is the primary payer for long-term care (LTC),** and long term care comprises about one-third of total Medicaid spending. With nursing home costs averaging about \$75,000 per year, it does not take long for middle class seniors to spend-down their life savings on to Medicaid.
- **Deep cuts to Medicaid threaten vital home and community-based long term services and supports.** America's seniors and families overwhelmingly want to remain independent in their homes and communities for as long as possible, if faced with a severe illness or disability – yet cuts to Medicaid threaten these services at the state level, leading to an increased reliance on institutional care in nursing homes.

I share your deep concern about our nation's fiscal situation and the damaging – even disastrous – proposals to Medicare and Medicaid that have been put forward to address the deficit. It is therefore my sincere desire to work with organizations like AARP, to make sure that the Medicaid program is treated with the full and equal weight it deserves.

I would be happy to speak with you in the near future to discuss the vital importance of Medicaid to our nation's seniors, and look forward to working with you to protect health and long-term services and supports for our nation's seniors.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller IV