November 19, 2019

The Honorable Charles Grassley Chairman Senate Finance Committee 219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg. Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone Chairman House Energy & Commerce Committee 2125 Rayburn House Office Bldg Washington, D.C. 20515 The Honorable Ron Wyden Ranking Member Senate Finance Committee 219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg. Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Greg Walden Ranking Member House Energy & Commerce Committee 2322 A Rayburn House Office Bldg. Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Grassley and Pallone and Ranking Members Wyden and Walden:

As organizations, businesses and community groups working to remove barriers to healthy living, we urge Congress to fix a legislative oversight that has led to inequitable access to health care for thousands of Pacific Islanders in the United States. Since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), people residing in the United States under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) have been categorically ineligible for Medicaid. This has caused thousands of Pacific Islanders to be denied basic access to health care, undermining the U.S. relationship with our COFA allies and causing worse health outcomes for COFA families in the U.S.

The Compacts of Free Association are critical U.S. national security and economic agreements with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau (collectively referred to as the Freely Associated States or FAS). Under the provisions of these agreements, citizens of the FAS may travel to, live, and work in the U.S. in exchange for the U.S. military's exclusive use of and access to these nation's lands, territorial waters, and airspace in the Pacific.

Before 1996, COFA citizens in the U.S. had access to Medicaid through their designation as legally residing non-citizen nationals. Unfortunately, PRWORA stripped COFA communities living in the U.S. of their eligibility for most means-tested federal benefits, including Medicaid. By all accounts, when passing PRWORA, Congress unintentionally excluded this important population from the category of "qualified immigrants" for purposes of federal benefits eligibility.

As a result, over 61,000 COFA individuals and families living in the U.S. and its Pacific territories have struggled to access essential care, despite paying taxes and serving in the U.S. military at per capita rates higher than most U.S. states. Many face serious chronic conditions and health disparities, due to dependency on the U.S., as well as the effects of military activity in the FAS, including nuclear testing. These conditions, such as elevated rates of cancer and diabetes, grow more severe if left untreated.

In August 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo noted that the COFA nations are "great friends of the United States," during his visit to the FAS. Given this friendship, it is time for Congress to act to ensure that COFA communities are not excluded from health insurance. We applaud Senators Hirono (D-HI) and Schatz (D-HI), and Representatives Cárdenas (D-CA), Radewagen (R-AS), Gabbard (D-HI), Womack (R-AR), Case (D-HI), and Sablan (D-MP) for introducing S. 2218 and H.R 4821, respectively, the Covering Our FAS Allies (COFA) Act. We also appreciate the actions by some states, including Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Arkansas, to use limited state resources to extend health coverage to the community.

To honor the spirit of the Compacts of Free Association and rectify a legislative mistake made nearly 25 years ago, Congress must restore Medicaid eligibility for COFA residents.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

ACCESS

ADAP Advocacy Association

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

American Muslim Health Professionals

American Public Health Association

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership (APPEAL)

Association for Community Affiliated Plans

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Cancer Council of the Pacific Islands

Caring Across Generations

Catholic Health Association of the United States

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Coalition for Disability Health Equity

Coalition on Human Needs

COFA-Community Leadership Advocacy Network

CommonHealth ACTION

CommonSpirit Health

Community Access National Network (CANN)

Community Catalyst

Community Health Network of Washington

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)

Families USA

First Focus Campaign for Children

Guttmacher Institute

Hep B United

Hepatitis B Foundation

Indivisible

Justice in Aging

March of Dimes

Marshall Islands Ministry of Health and Human Services

Medicare Rights Center

Micronesian Health Advisory Coalition/ COFA-CLAN

MomsRising

NAACP

NAPAFASA

NASTAD

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)

National Association of Atomic Veterans

National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV)

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Association of Social Workers

National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Council of Asian Pacific Americans

National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians

National Council of Jewish Women

National Disability Rights Network

National Health Law Program

National Immigration Law Center

National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH)

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund

National Organization for Women

National Partnership for Women & Families

National Task Force on Hepatitis B Focus on Asian and Pacific Islander Americans

National WIC Association

National Women's Health Network

National Women's Law Center

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

Pacific Island Health Officers Association

Papa Ola Lōkahi

Partnership for America's Children

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

PRS Pharmacy Services

RESULTS

Samoana Integrated Learning Initiative

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

SPLC Action Fund

Treatment Action Group (TAG)

UnidosUS

Union of North American Vietnamese Student Associations

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Young Invincibles

State and Local Organizations

Arizona (AZ)

Asian Pacific Community in Action

Physicians for Social Responsibility, Arizona Chapter

Arkansas (AR)

ACOM

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese

Community Clinic NWA

Community Pharmacy of Springdale

Faith Full Gospel Church

La Prensa Libre

Marshallese Educational Initiative

Mercy Arkansas

Northwest Medical Center- Springdale

NWA African American Heritage Assn

OurPharma LLC

Rinamu

St Francis House NWA, Inc DBA Community Clinic

UAMS

University of Arkansas for Medical Scineces

California (CA)

Alameda Health Consortium

API Equality-LA

APLA Health

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement

California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC)

California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates

Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. (CAB)

Kern Family Healthcare

Korean Community Center of the East Bay

Latino Coalition for a Healthy CA

LifeLong Medical Care

Maternal and Child Health Access

North East Medical Services

Orange County Asian & Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)

Pacific Asian Counseling Services

Physicians for Social Responsibility, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter

Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles

Regional Pacific Islander Taskforce

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

Taulama for Tongans

United Cambodian Community

Western Center on Law & Poverty

Colorado (CO)

Asian Pacific Development Center

Florida (FL)

Asian American Federation of Florida

Emgage

eMgage Foundation

Florida Asian Services

Florida Chinese Federation

NANAY CEDC

North Miami Beach Chinese Senior Club

OCA South Florida Chapter

Georgia (GA)

Center for Pan Asian Community Services, Inc.

Hawaii

AlohaCare

Catholic Charities Hawaii

Chuukese Catholic Community of Hawaii

Hawai'i Children's Action Network

Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center

Hep Free Hawaii

IHS, The Institute for Human Services

Kokua Kalihi Valley

Lanai Community Health Center

Mālama I Ke Ola Health Center

Maui Economic Opportunity

Micronesian Health Advisory Coalition

Micronesians United Big Island (MU-BI)

Nations of Micronesia Committee

Pacific Islands Primary Care Association

Parents And Children Together

Partners in Development Foundation

Progressive Democrats of Hawaii

St Elizabeth's Episcopal Church

The Queen's Health Systems

Waimanalo Health Center

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Center

We Are Oceania

Idaho (ID)

Idaho Voices for Children

Illinois (IL)

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Chicago Center for Asian Health Equity

Iowa (IA)

Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity PSR Iowa

Kentucky (KY)

Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Louisiana (LA)

NOELA Community Health Center

Maine (ME)

Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter

Maryland (MD)

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility Public Justice Center

Massachusetts (MA)

Pioneer Valley Physicians for Social Responsibility Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Michigan (MI)

APIA VOTE MI

Minnesota (MN)

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Mississippi (MS)

Boat People SOS Inc.

Missouri (MO)

Springfield Marshallese community

Nevada (NV)

Asian Community Development Council Southern Nevada Health District

New Mexico (NM)

New Mexico Asian Family Center New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty

New York (NY)

Amida Care

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

Children's Defense Fund - New York

Chinese-American Planning Council

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)

Kalusugan Coalition

Philippine Nurses Association of New York Inc.

North Carolina (NC)

Western North Carolina Chapter Physicians for Social Responsibility

Northern Mariana Islands (MP)

Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Ohio (OH)

Asian Services in Action, Inc.

Oklahoma (OK)

Enid Oklahoma New Hope Marshallese Micronesian Coalition Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy Oklahoma Micronesian Coalition Rural Health Projects, Inc.

Oregon (OR)

APANO (Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon) COFA Alliance National Network

Micronesian Islander Community

Northwest Islanders Club

Oregon Association of Atomic Veterans (OAAV)V

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

Salem Keizer Coalition for Equality

The Insurance Coach, LLC

Pennsylvania (PA)

SEAMAAC, Inc.

Rhode Island (RI)

Center for Southeast Asians Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island

Tennessee (TN)

Physicians for Social Responsibility - TN Chapter

Texas (TX)

Asian American Health Coalition Austin Asian Community Health Initiative Center for Public Policy Priorities Light and Salt Association

Utah (UT)

Healthy West Valley Task Force

Hui Hawai'i O Utah Hawaiian Civic Club

New Hope Marshallese

OCA Asian Pacific Islander American Advocates Utah

Southern Utah Pacific Islander Coalition

The National Tongan American Society

United Micronesian Women

University of Utah Pacific Islander Medical Student Association

Utah Marshallese Association

Utah Pacific Islander Civic Engagement Coalition

Utah Pacific Islander Health Coalition

Virginia (VA)

Korean Community Service Center of Greater Washington

NAKASEC VA

Virginia Poverty Law Center

Washington (WA)

AFT Washington

Arcora Foundation

Asia Pacific Cultural Center

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Washington State

Children's Alliance

COFA Alliance National Network of Washington

Community Health Board Coalition

Community Health Plan of Washington

Everett Marshallese Association

Everett Marshallese Ministry United Church of Christ

Faith Action Network - Washington State

Health Care Is a Human Right WA

IDIC Filipino Senior & Family Services

International Community Health Services

Islamic Civic Engagement Project

League of Women Voters- WA State

Marshallese Community Of Washington

Marshallese New Hope Church

No More Bombs

Northwest Harvest

Northwest Health Law Advocates

OneAmerica

P.I.C.A.- Pacific Island Community Association

Pacific Island Health Board

Pacific Islander Community Association

Pacific Islander Health Alliance North West(PIHA NW)

Pacific Islander Health Board of Washington

Peace & Justice Action League of Spokane

Physicians for a National Health Program Western Washington Chapter

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action

Seattle Marshallese Community

South Puget Sound Asian Pacific Islander Coalition (APIC)

Statewide Poverty Action Network

Thanks Country Doctor Community Health Centers

The Charis Clinic

U.T.O.P.I.A. Seattle

United for Single Payer

Veterans For Peace Spokane Chapter #35

WA CAPAA Commission

Washington Against Nuclear Weapons Coalition Washington Community Action Network Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

Wisconsin (WI)

Children's Community Health Plan End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin Physicians for Social Responsibility Wisconsin