



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Friday, May 27, 2011

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## **Consumers Applaud Senate for Standing Firm Against Cuts to Medicare and Medicaid**

### **Statement of Cathy Levine and Col Owens, Co-chairs of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, on the Senate vote on the House of Representatives' 2012 Budget Plan**

(COLUMBUS, OH) - "Wednesday's Senate vote on efforts to undermine Medicare and Medicaid were a firm rejection of a disastrous plan that would take away the health security Americans have counted on since 1965 and force the most vulnerable Ohioans to shoulder a disproportionate share of the nation's budget problems. We are very grateful to Senator Sherrod Brown for voting against the plan and disappointed in the 'yes' vote from Senator Portman.

Medicare and Medicaid must be protected. They are the foundation of our health care system, ensuring that Ohioans get the care we need as we age, or if we become disabled or fall on hard times. The House Republican plan would effectively end Medicare as we know it by privatizing it and forcing future beneficiaries to pay twice as much as if they were on traditional Medicare.

We recognize the need to make responsible decisions about reducing the deficit. But capping Medicaid or converting the program into a block grant is not a real solution. During a time of fragile economic recovery, it is even more important to protect Medicaid and the people it serves. In fact, the 2010 Ohio Family Survey found that Medicaid is working as intended - as an important safety net helping Ohioans who have lost jobs and wages during this recession. Moreover, shifting the costs from the federal government to states, families and providers does nothing to address the underlying problem of rising health care costs overall.

States are already doing what they can to reduce Medicaid spending. In Ohio, Governor Kasich's administration is promoting policies that will improve the quality of care provided through Medicaid and reduce costs. We urge our federal delegation to follow Ohio's example in developing proposals that respond to budgetary problems, instead of imposing block grants or allowing states to cut eligibility and enrollment.

The American public agrees: A Kaiser poll released this week shows 60 percent of Americans favor keeping the program as it is.

Federal cuts to critical safety net programs like Medicaid and Medicare are not the answer to addressing the ballooning deficit or rising health care costs - they would simply pass the buck by shifting costs from the federal government to the states, and then on to families and providers.

Instead, policymakers should build on the cost containment framework that is already part of the Affordable Care Act and focus on reducing excessive insurance premiums, giving people the care they need to stay out of hospitals and nursing homes, and investing in public health measures to reduce heart disease, diabetes and other chronic illnesses that lead to higher health care costs.

It's important to reduce the deficit and get health care costs under control, but we urge Members of Congress to do so in a humane way that reflects our priorities and doesn't cause harm to the most vulnerable members of our society - those who rely on Medicare and Medicaid to stay healthy and live productive lives."

*Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage is a nonpartisan coalition uniting the diverse consumer voice with the goal of achieving affordable, high quality care for all. Our membership includes AFSCME Council 8 AFL-CIO, American Cancer Society East Central Division, Faith Community Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, National Alliance for Mental Illness of Ohio, National Multiple Sclerosis Society Ohio Chapters, Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans, Ohio Asian American Health Coalition, Ohio Council of Churches, Progress Ohio, Service Employees International Union, Toledo Area Jobs with Justice Coalition, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1059, UHCAN Ohio, and We Are The Uninsured.*

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