

March 19, 2019

Lt. Gov. Randy McNally  
Tennessee Senate

Speaker Glen Casada  
Tennessee House of Representatives

Governor Bill Lee  
Tennessee State Capitol

RE: Medicaid block grants

Gentlemen:

We write today offer to offer our organizations as resources to you and your staff. Together, we represent hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children, seniors and their families who benefit directly or indirectly from the federal Medicaid program, which of course is known in our state as TennCare. In advance of any proposals that would alter TennCare, we would like to meet and discuss any such proposals' impact on the communities we serve.

Our organizations share your commitment, expressed eloquently in Governor Lee's State of the State address, to ensuring that "every Tennessean should have access to high-quality health care they can afford." As you know, TennCare is vital to fulfilling that commitment. The program provides critical healthcare coverage to 1.3 million Tennessee residents including the majority of our frail nursing home residents, over half of all Tennessee children, and most Tennesseans with severe disabilities. The program is the largest funder of services for the prevention and treatment of mental illness and addiction. It is the principal source of coverage of Tennessee families and children in our rural communities.

Given the program's importance and the state's obligation to be a responsible steward of the \$7.5 billion in federal funds that TennCare receives, it is imperative that any significant changes to the program be thoughtfully designed and carefully vetted. Even a small misstep can cause harm to thousands of our most vulnerable neighbors.

As you know, under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act, states can apply to change provisions of federal Medicaid law for demonstration projects that are likely to *promote the objectives of the Medicaid program*, such as testing new delivery and payment models or improving behavioral health services. States, including Tennessee, have utilized Section 1115 to implement important changes to their Medicaid programs. We support those changes that improve health care for enrollees and that make more effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Our organizations are deeply concerned, however, by proposals to use the Medicaid waiver process to make changes that would adversely impact individuals. Wholesale waiver of federal Medicaid laws and regulations would eliminate federal consumer protections, threaten people's health coverage, and do away with safeguards that are necessary to ensure the program's financial integrity. For this reason, we respectfully oppose any proposal for a "block grant" or other waiver that would radically alter TennCare and potentially endanger the public.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our organizations always stand ready to assist you and other state officials in your efforts to improve life for all Tennesseans.

Sincerely,

A Better Balance: The Work & Family Legal Center  
Board of Church and Society, Tennessee Conference United Methodist Church  
Coalition for a Strong Tennessee  
Council on Aging of Middle TN  
Disability Rights Tennessee  
Family Voices of Tennessee  
League of Women Voters  
Matthew Walker Comprehensive Health Center, Inc.  
Mental Health America of the MidSouth  
Mental Health Association of East Tennessee  
Nashville CARES  
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Tennessee  
National Health Care for the Homeless Council  
National Organization for Rare Disorders  
Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee  
Tennessee Afterschool Network  
Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug & Other Addiction Services  
Tennessee Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers  
Tennessee Coalition for Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services  
Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare  
Tennessee Disability Coalition  
Tennessee Health Care Campaign  
Tennessee Justice Center  
Tennessee Mental Health Consumers' Association  
The Arc Tennessee  
The Family Center  
The John and Natasha Deane Foundation  
The Middle Ground Tennessee  
United Ways of Tennessee  
YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee

cc: Tennessee General Assembly