

February 6, 2012

The Honorable Brenda Landwehr, Chair
The Honorable Owen Donohoe, Vice Chair
House Health and Human Services Committee

Reference: House Bill 2520 – Interstate Health Care Compact legislation

Good morning Chairperson Landwehr, Vice Chairperson Donohoe and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee. My name is David Wilson and I am currently a volunteer and the past state president for AARP Kansas. We represent more than 340,000 members in Kansas. Thank you for this opportunity to express our comments on HB 2520. AARP opposes HB 2520 because it is a frivolous measure that does nothing at best, and at worst puts seniors, Kansans with disabilities, and children at risk. The proposal has been vetoed in Arizona, New Mexico and Montana.

When I took the post of AARP Kansas State President over six years ago, our members told me, "Don't let the politicians hurt Medicare or Social Security." That is why I am here today to testify in opposition to House Bill 2520 which would make Kansas part of an Interstate Health Care Compact.

This bill would give the state all of the federal health care funding for Medicare, Medicaid, and the federal Children's Health Insurance Program and other health care programs and allow the state to determine how those funds would be spent and how those programs would operate.

Tucked into this is the caveat that the bill is not effective until Congress consents to the right of states to enter the compact and suspend the operation of any conflicting federal law. Congress will never give that consent.

Medicare is one of the most popular federal programs in the country. A Harris Poll released earlier this year found that 88 percent of those polled support the health care

program for seniors. In fact Medicare ranked as the most popular program with 57 percent supporting it a great deal and 31 percent supporting it somewhat.

It would be a serious mistake to turn this program over to the state. Since 1965, Medicare beneficiaries have received guaranteed benefits, protections, and have never once had to worry about their Medicare. In fact, over the years, their Medicare has been improved. By joining a health care compact seniors could find themselves thrown into a whole new health care system with different benefits, fewer choices, and less access to care. Why risk the health care and security of the nearly 430,000 Medicare beneficiaries in Kansas.

There is a national conversation now underway on how to ensure the future of Medicare for the country. Republicans and Democrats are looking at ways to protect this program so it can continue to provide health care coverage for seniors and those who are disabled and for future generations. As the Trustees Report showed, Medicare will be solvent for the next 13 years. There is time to address the needs of the program and put it on a firmer financial foundation for the future. What is not needed is a plan to dismantle the program and dole out its funds to states to operate a fractured and fragmented program.

So many questions come to mind about how a compact would work and there are so few answers. Who would be responsible for the state's Medicare funds? Won't this make it more difficult to recruit doctors? Will the state cut benefits below what the federal government now provides? What will happen if more funding is needed for Medicaid? Will those dollars come from Medicare? What you are doing is asking the people of Kansas to buy a pig in a poke with the promise that IF Congress agrees to provide the funding then Kansas can recreate a system that is already in place and working. While I believe there are many things that we in Kansas do better than other states and other governments, I am not sure we should create a whole new level of bureaucracy just to see if we can do better with Medicare.

This bill will jeopardize security, choice and benefits for seniors and people with disabilities in Kansas who rely on the Medicare program for their health care coverage. This bill is scary because it carries with it impacts and consequences for all Kansans who rely on

federal laws to protect their health care. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Under the Compact bill, Kansas citizens could lose many rights and protections they don't even realize are in danger.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our opposition to HB 2520 and we respectfully request that you oppose this bill.

David Wilson

Attachments: Montana and Arizona governor's veto message.