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May 5, 2003

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
House of Representatives
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Dingell:

On behalf of the American Congress of Community Supports and Employment Services (ACCSES), I would like to thank you for introducing the "Strengthening Our States Act of 2003" and offer our organization's strong support for the legislation.

ACCSES is a national, nonprofit organization comprised of providers of vocational rehabilitation services and community supports committed to maximizing employment opportunities and independent living for people with physical and mental disabilities. We offer our support for your legislation because Medicaid is an important component to our organization's goal of providing our clients with access to a comprehensive health care and community services safety net. Without Medicaid, many people would not recover from illness and return to work, have access to medically necessary medication, or live independent lives with a disability.

With the crisis in funding many states face with a weakened economy, Medicaid services are often the first place to be reduced or cut altogether. States greatly want to provide services essential to our clients with disabilities, but they are forced to cut them because the federal government simply does not provide enough funding to keep Medicaid operating at a level sustainable by state governments. However, your bill does provide additional federal fiscal relief for states. It also increases flexibility in implementing the program to allow crucial services for our clients to receive the supports they need. Finally, your legislation creates incentives and assistance to avoid cuts to existing coverage and facilitates coverage expansions in the future.

We particularly support the provisions of your bill that assist people with disabilities obtain health care and other services. Of particular note is the enhanced federal

assistance for all home- and community-based waivers. This will establish the Federal Government as a permanent committed partner in assisting people with disabilities in the transition to the most appropriate community setting. It will also help states achieve the goals outlined in *Olmstead*, the landmark court decision on people with disabilities. We also support the provisions that facilitate coverage of people with disabilities and their families and provide more flexibility for states to reach out to these families.

ACCSES is very supportive of your bill's provision for full federal funding for people with disabilities who are waiting to qualify for Medicare coverage. In addition, we also support the bill's allowance of spouses of people working with a disability who are covered under Medicaid to buy-in to Medicaid coverage. This provision will help families get uniform health coverage. The legislation also allows states the flexibility to cover children with disabilities under Medicaid without forcing their family to become impoverished or surrender their child to the state.

ACCSES would like to commend you for crafting legislation that seeks to improve and strengthen the existing Medicaid program. We are opposed to any attempts to "block grant" the program, remove federal accountability, and, as the Medicaid reform proposal outlined in the budget resolution would do, provide "budget neutral" funding increases to the states that would leave beneficiaries and state Medicaid programs across the country withering on the vine 5 years from now.

ACCSES would like to thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring that the original promises of the Medicaid program are continued and strengthened. We look forward to working with you and members of your Committee in passing Medicaid legislation this year that protects and enhances the Medicaid program without block grants.

If you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact Brandon Macsata in our Washington, DC, office at (202) 466-3355.

Sincerely,

s/
Stephen H. Perdue
President
ACCSES