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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 Disability Service Providers of America (DSPA), 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.

DSPA is a trade association formed to strengthen the effectiveness of direct service provider agencies by prioritizing, shaping and advocating for focused and targeted national policies and legislation that will result in the promotion and enhancement of services and supports to individuals with disabilities. DSPA's membership is comprised of 22 direct service provider organizations from around the United States, with combined operating budgets totaling over \$445.3 million.

States greatly want to provide services essential to persons with disabilities, but they are forced to make cuts or eliminate services because the federal government simply does not provide enough funding to keep Medicaid operating at a level sustainable by state governments. However, your bill provides an additional \$30 billion in badly needed federal fiscal relief for states. It also increases flexibility in implementing the program to allow crucial services for our clients to receive the services 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.

DSPA 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.

For the record, DSPA is staunchly opposed to any attempts to "block grant" the Medicaid 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.

DSPA 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 me at 202-429-6810.

Sincerely,

John D. Kemp
CEO