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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Contact: Jodi Seth or Brin Frazier, 202-225-5735

Dingell, Pallone Highlight Committee's Commitment to Disabled Americans

Washington, DC — The Committee on Energy and Commerce held its first hearing of the year today to examine Medicaid coverage for people with disabilities. The Subcommittee on Health hearing, entitled "Helping Families with Needed Care: Medicaid's Critical Role for Americans with Disabilities," focused on efforts to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to live in the least restrictive environment available and recent legislative and Administrative actions that affect access to community care services.

"One of the challenges we face is how to improve access to community services instead of making nursing homes and institutions the first options for care," said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "We know that those who receive community-based services have an improved quality of life, and are better able to be near family and friends."

The Medicaid program provides essential funding for millions of Americans living with disabilities, including seniors in

nursing homes, children born with birth defects, people struggling with mental illness or intellectual disability and adults whose disabilities occur later in life. Medicaid is currently the nation's primary source of funding for the delivery of community-based and long-term services to the disabled. However, funding traditionally favors nursing home care over the range of community-based services available. Witnesses from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Family Voices, ADAPT, the ARC of New Jersey, ResCare and Amerigroup of Texas provided testimony regarding Medicaid's impact on disabled Americans.

"Over the years, Medicaid has enabled millions of Americans with a wide range of disabilities to live independent lives," Pallone said. "However, as America continues to age, we are faced with an impending crisis in long term care. With the introduction of the CLASS Act, the Community Choice Act and the Direct Support Professionals Fairness & Security Act, we are offering a new approach that builds upon our existing safety net system and helps our elderly finance the long term care they need to remain active and productive members of their communities."

Witnesses and Committee Members also discussed the Administration's proposed Medicaid rules, which would limit reimbursement to states for rehabilitative and school-based services. Prior to adjourning in 2007, Congress enacted a moratorium on implementing the rules. The six-month moratorium, which would delay the effective date to June 30, 2008, was included in the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act of 2007. The rules, if implemented as proposed, would limit or eliminate transportation and health care services that are essential to disabled Americans.

Chairman Dingell's full statement

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515