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August 20, 1999

U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Representative:

I am writing on behalf of the over one million members of the AFT to urge your support for bipartisan patients rights legislation, H. R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Empowerment Act of 1999. Hopefully, when Congress returns from its August recess, the House of Representatives will have the opportunity to vote on this important bill.

This bipartisan measure, introduced by Representatives Charles Norwood (R-GA) and John Dingell (D-MI), is compromise patients' rights legislation that retains essential features of the Patients Bill of Rights, H.R. 358, that AFT has also supported.

The bipartisan bill (H.R. 2723), which applies to all 161 million Americans with health insurance coverage, has these essential features:

- Ensures access to emergency care without prior authorization, following a "prudent lay person" standard;
- Authorizes direct access to OB/GYNs and pediatricians to be primary care physicians;
- Provides access to pediatric specialties;
- Provides for continuity of care when there is a change of plan or change in the provider network;
- Provides for an independent external appeals process;
- Authorizes patients to sue health plans in state courts, but disallows punitive damages if a plan complies with an independent external appeals decision;
- Provides that doctors and nurses can report quality problems without fear of retaliation from Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), insurance companies and hospitals.

AFT is particularly pleased that H. R. 2723 contains protection against retaliation for health care workers acting as patient advocates. The AFT is proud to represent over 53,000 health care professionals who know such protections for patient advocacy are an essential component of quality health care.

H.R. 2723 offers the House a very real opportunity to enact legislation on a bipartisan basis that will improve the quality of managed care. The American Federation of Teachers urges you to co-sponsor and support this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

Charlotte J. Fraas
Director of Federal Legislation
Office of Government Relations