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Contact: Kathy McGinley 202-785-3388

September 7, 1999

The Honorable John Dingell  
The Honorable Charles Norwood  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Representatives Norwood and Dingell:

The Arc of the United States – with over 100,000 members -- is the largest voluntary organization in the nation devoted solely to working on behalf of children and adults with mental retardation and their families. Access to quality health care is a critical issue for people with mental retardation and it is an important goal of The Arc. Many children and adults with mental retardation need greater than average access to specialists or to health related services, such as therapies in order to live healthy, independent and productive lives in the community. Managed care – with its emphasis on cutting costs – often is dangerous for people with high health care needs.

The Arc is writing to express its support for H.R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Act of 1999. We believe that – with this legislation – you have taken an important step by putting aside partisanship and trying to deal fairly with what consumers and families have been calling for – strong managed care protections. The Arc urges you to continue to work to help children and adults with mental retardation and their families get access to the health care they need. This bill would do a number of important things. It would help ensure that people with disabilities have:

- Access to specialty care, including the opportunity to have a specialist as a gatekeeper or a standing referral for individuals with "ongoing special conditions".
- Continuity of care protections so that people with ongoing special conditions can continue to see their provider for a set period of time if, for some reason, the provider is no longer part of the plan.
- Access to prescription drugs not in a plan's formulary if it is shown that a drug, other than those offered by the plan, is medically indicated.
- Access to an independent external appeals process that leaves decision making up to health care professionals and not insurance companies;
- Access to fair remedies if a health plan decision causes harm.

The Arc urges you to oppose provisions such as Medical Savings Accounts (MSAs) and Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements (MEWAs). These measures only help the healthy and wealthy – not those who really need access to affordable health care -- and they would be harmful to our private insurance system.

The Arc looks forward to working with you to pass H.R. 2723 and have it enacted into law. Children and adults with mental retardation and their families need these protections. Again, thank you for your hard work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Doss".

Brenda Doss  
President  
The Arc of the United States