

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Health Care Lifeline: The Affordable Care Act and the Covid-19 Pandemic”
September 23, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented health and economic crisis — 200,000 Americans have lost their lives, more than six million have been infected with the disease and tens of millions have lost their jobs. Millions of American families are justifiably anxious and concerned about both their health and their financial security.

The Heroes Act, which the House passed more than four months ago, would provide more support and assistance to struggling families, by expanding the health care safety net, increasing support to states to fund their Medicaid programs, and ensuring access to free treatment for COVID-19. Unfortunately, Senator McConnell and the Trump Administration either do not understand the need for the federal government to take bold action, or worse, they prefer to willfully ignore and downplay the seriousness of the challenge we face. Let me be clear — further delay in passing the Heroes Act will cost us countless lives, lasting damage to our economy, and immeasurable financial hardship to millions of American families.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration is not interested in working with Congress to address this crisis. Instead, the Administration is actually seeking to do further damage to our health care system and to the social safety net that millions of Americans have turned to during this crisis.

President Trump continues to support the Republican lawsuit that is now before the Supreme Court to strike down the entire Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the middle of a pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Americans. And now, the President and Senate Republicans are trying to jam a Supreme Court nominee through the Senate just a month before the Presidential election, in attempt to seal the fate of the ACA and ensure its demise.

I want to remind folks what is at stake here if the Trump Administration succeeds:

- 20 million Americans would lose their health care coverage;
- protections for the more than 133 million people with pre-existing conditions would be eliminated and everyone who has been infected with COVID-19 now has a pre-existing condition;
- tax credits for affordable health coverage would be gone;
- young adults would no longer be able to stay on their parent’s insurance until they turn 26; and much, much more.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Instead of attacking the ACA, the Trump Administration could use it to help people in time of crisis. According to a Census Bureau survey, over three million Americans have lost employer-sponsored coverage between April and July of this year alone. Yet, the Administration has refused to establish a broad Special Enrollment Period to allow uninsured Americans to sign up for coverage through the ACA marketplaces.

The Administration also refuses to invest in outreach and enrollment efforts to make Americans aware of their coverage options, and instead, has imposed arbitrary barriers seemingly intended to deter enrollment. In contrast, state-based marketplaces that have implemented broad emergency Special Enrollment Periods have reported significant enrollment during the pandemic.

The Administration also continues to undermine Medicaid, even though it has been a lifeline for millions during the pandemic. According to one estimate, since February, Medicaid enrollment has increased by 6 million people nationwide. There's never a good time to be without health insurance, and it's especially dangerous during a pandemic. A study by the University of Michigan found that even before the pandemic, Medicaid expansion had saved the lives of over 19,000 adults between the ages of 55 and 64. Medicaid is helping people keep health care coverage when they need it most.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to better understand the ACA's impact on the status of health coverage amidst COVID-19, and what needs to be done to expand and improve access to quality, affordable health care. It is also an opportunity to reflect on what's at stake when the Supreme Court hears oral arguments in *Texas v. California* on November 11. While the ACA has been a lifeline for millions during the pandemic, its future once again hangs in the balance with the Supreme Court. The stakes could not be higher.

I look forward to the discussion today and I yield back.