

Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (MP-At Large)
Testimony before the Committee on Energy and Commerce
Member Day Hearing
July 13, 2021

Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony for this Member Day hearing.

Until last Friday, I would have expected to be talking with you about the Medicaid cliff the Marianas faces on September 30, along with the other U.S. insular areas.

With the announcement Friday by Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers that agreement has been reached on a multi-year plan to steer us away from that funding cliff my testimony changes from a request for action to a thank you.

I understand that Mr. Soto and Mr. Bilirakis are introducing the necessary legislation to put this bipartisan agreement on a long-term solution for Medicaid in the Marianas, American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico; and a Health Subcommittee mark-up will quickly follow.

Again, I am very grateful to all involved.

Of course, it is the rare, negotiated agreement that leaves all parties completely satisfied. Some compromise and concession are usually required.

The agreement announced Friday is no exception.

Current funding for the insular area Medicaid will revert to statutory levels on October 1, when the deal agreed in Public Law 116-94, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal 2020, expires.

If the new deal, has not been enacted by October 1, the health care system in the Marianas will suddenly have one-tenth the funding we have been receiving. Our local match will triple. Other insular areas face similar sharp cutbacks in funding and increases in the local match. Perhaps, we will not go over the cliff on October 1, but we will be teetering perilously on the edge.

So, getting the new deal enacted as quickly as possible must be a priority.

I will also note that as generous and welcome as the deal announced Friday may be, we have only kicked the underlying problem down the road.

Until Americans in the Marianas and in all the U.S. insular areas are provided the same access to Medicaid that Americans elsewhere in our nation have, Congress will be forced to return to this issue again and again.

I may not be sitting here eight years from now, when the deal comes due. Leadership in the Committee and in Congress may change. But eight years from now someone will have to go

through the same difficult process of negotiation that Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers and the other members of this committee have just successfully completed.

More importantly, eight years from now Americans in the insular areas, who depend on Medicaid for their health insurance, and the public and private providers of those health services will again be on the edge of their seats, wondering if the system will collapse.

One thing I have learned in my thirteen years in Congress is to accept that change most often occurs in incremental steps. I accept the deal on insular area Medicaid announced last Friday is such an incremental step—a large and significant step in the right direction. A large and significant step for which I am most grateful.

Ultimately, however, the people I represent, Americans, just like those the members of this committee represent, deserve to have the same federally assisted health insurance available in the rest of our nation.

We are making an important step towards that goal with Friday's deal, but we will still have a way to go to treat all Americans equitably.

Thanks, once more, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and the members of this committee for the work you have accomplished on insular area Medicaid.

And congratulations on proving that bipartisan agreement is possible for people of goodwill.