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Senator John Kerry  
218 Russell Building  
2nd floor  
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kerry,

Thank you for your service on the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. On behalf of Massachusetts Health Council, and our 152 member organizations, thank you for accepting this critical assignment and working tirelessly to ensure the long-term solvency of our country.

We know that your analysis and recommendations will encompass programs across the entire spectrum of government services and functions. While health care programs are only part of the equation, they impact individuals' lives in the most direct and personal way. This is particularly true for Medicaid, on which low-income individuals and children rely for life-saving treatment and preventive care. This fact, combined with the anticipated growth in the Medicaid program contemplated by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, led Congressional negotiators and the President to protect Medicaid from sequestration should the Joint Committee not produce recommendations to achieve the requisite level of deficit reduction.

We are concerned about the impact deep cuts would have on the MA reform effort. The MA experiment has been a success – over 98% of residents are enrolled in coverage program – stakeholders are moving forward and important progress has been achieved in reducing costs and restructuring the way care is delivered. Deep Medicaid/Medicare cuts would imperil this important national model.

Also, severe cuts to Health and Human Services will be translated into cuts of very successful prevention programs. Just in Massachusetts, we know that smoking-related illnesses cost us more than \$4.5 billion per year in smoking-attributable health care expenses. Obesity-related illnesses cost the Commonwealth an estimated \$1.82 billion dollars in medical care costs, preventable hospitalizations result in \$639 million in costs. Cancer screening, teen pregnancy, school health, smoking cessation, violence prevention, substance abuse, environmental health, communicable disease control, to name a few, are all reduced with prevention programs. We must preserve, protect, expand, and reimburse screening for early detection of diseases because they cost less to

treat when caught early. Think about the cost savings to the system if we worked on eliminating these preventable visits.

There are 25.8 million people in the United States, or 8.3% of the population, who have diabetes; 28.6 million with heart disease. The solution to improving health status and saving money is prevention. If we can keep people out of the health care system because they don't need it, if we can help people understand how to manage their chronic illness and how to properly take their medication, eat healthier and live healthier lives by encouraging and educating residents on how to do this, we can save billions of dollars in health care costs.

The committee is faced with an enormous task. To assist you, we hope you consider both short term savings and long term return on investment, when you consider the following:

- Programs that yield preventive health benefits;
- Programs that facilitate patient access to care;
- Programs that support creating healthier environments and communities.

Also, we would like to mention that government has an important role to play in improving health status of our residents. Protecting funding for the research and development of cures to diseases is a very important mission of government. The private sector will not fund discoveries that are not commercially viable which leaves a whole segment of the ill population with no hope. This is where government funding steps in, to make sure efforts are made to resolve diseases that are "less popular." If research funding is cut, cures for many disabling diagnoses will never be found.

Please consider us a resource as you and your colleagues proceed with the final stages of deliberations about the most effective ways to restrain health care costs and preserve and strengthen the health care system for future generations. Together we must push a prevention agenda. It is the only way to save lives and lower health care costs. Again, thank you for your consideration and for the important work you will undertake.

Sincerely,

Susan H. Servais  
Executive Director

cc. US HHS Secretary Kathleen Sibelius  
US Assist Secretary Dr. Howard Koh  
MA EOHHS Secretary JudyAnn Bigby  
MA DPH Commissioner John Auerbach