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NACo’s Large Urban County Caucus:
Don’t block grant Medicaid funds for the states

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Standing with West Virginia Senator John D. Rockefeller IV and a half dozen other U.S. Senators, members of the National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) today rallied on Capitol Hill for Congressional support to reject “reforms” that would cut, cap, or block grant Medicaid for the states. Medicaid is the health and long-term care insurance program for low-income children, families, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

“NACo opposes Medicaid cuts or changing it into a block grant for the states,” said LUCC Chair Ilene Lieberman, Commissioner, Broward County, Fla. “NACo also opposes capping entitlement programs. These proposals would simply shift Medicaid’s costs to counties.”


Lieberman this week led more than a dozen elected county officials from the nation’s largest counties during LUCC’s “fly-in” advocacy effort in Washington, D.C. Member of LUCC visited Congressional offices throughout the day Wednesday and Thursday to secure support for preserving Medicaid and supporting other federal funding priorities such as the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) and justice and public safety programs. LUCC is a bipartisan coalition of elected county officials representing about 130 million people.

During the event in the U.S. Capitol’s Visitors’ Center, Lieberman said counties in Florida and across the country administer parts of Medicaid for the states, help the states to finance Medicaid, and provide direct services to Medicaid beneficiaries in just about every setting. These include county hospitals and clinics; nursing homes and long term care facilities; public health departments and behavioral health, developmental disability and substance abuse treatment programs.

“Furthermore, in more than half the states, counties put up part of the non-federal share of Medicaid,” Lieberman said. “And in 23 states, counties are required to provide health care services to low-income residents. Whether you know it or not, counties have serious skin in the game!”
“This is why we are alarmed by proposals like those in the House-passed Budget Resolution which would turn Medicaid into a block grant – or other proposals to cap Medicaid,” she said. “We fear that what looks like helpful Medicaid ‘flexibility’ in Washington and Tallahassee may be experienced quite differently out in our counties. In fact, Medicaid ‘savings’ for the U.S. Treasury on the scale proposed by the House budget would necessarily require deep cuts to eligibility and benefits, reimbursements to public and private providers – and terrible choices for county officials. Commissioners would be forced to cut local services or to raise property taxes to sustain them. Both options will harm people and put a drag on our fragile economy.”

Lieberman was joined at the May 4 event by NACo Board of Director Member Tim McCormick, Commissioner, Ohio County, W. Va. McCormick said for 50 years Medicaid has been the way resources have been deployed to ensure a basic level of health care security for our country’s most vulnerable low income children, seniors and disabled.

“The deep pockets of persistent poverty in rural America made Medicaid a literal lifeline for many in our communities,” McCormick said. “Rural residents – both those under 65 years of age and seniors – are more likely to be enrolled in Medicaid compared to their urban counterparts.”

For those under 65 years of age, 15.3 percent of rural residents, but only 11.2 percent of urban residents, report that Medicaid is their primary source of health insurance. For rural seniors, 10.1 percent received Medicaid benefits compared to 8.2 percent of urban seniors.

“Rural residents, and especially in Appalachia, face substantial challenges in terms of health outcomes and access to health care,” McCormick said. “The deep cuts that would be required to achieve the savings called for in the House-passed budget or in the artificial spending caps under discussion would make an already bad situation much, much worse.”

NACo does recognize the need to address the federal debt and has recently urged President Obama and Congress to consider four key points while addressing the deficit:

- The budget deficit cannot be resolved by only cutting domestic, non-military discretionary programs;
- Federal assistance to state and local governments will help mitigate further layoffs;
- Federal investment in state and local infrastructure produces private sector jobs; and
- Deficit reduction should not be accomplished by shifting costs to counties, imposing unfunded mandates, or pre-empting county programs or taxing authority.

More information is available at www.naco.org.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.