Michigan League FOR Human Services

August 19, 2009

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senate
Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

On behalf of the Michigan League for Human Services, a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit policy and advocacy group for low-income residents and children, I am writing to urge you to insist that any health reform legislation passed by Congress explicitly address inequities in health and health care. Many millions of Americans—principally, people of color and those with low incomes—experience poorer health and higher mortality relative to national averages from the cradle to the grave. These inequities affect all of us in that they contribute to high health care costs, dampen economic productivity, and make the nation less healthy. They are avoidable with good public policy choices and investments, which make them totally unacceptable.

Congress can address these problems by expanding access to high-quality, affordable insurance coverage to everyone in our nation. Doing so will help people receive health care when needed and eliminate the tens of thousands of premature deaths that occur in the United States each year as a result of not having insurance. Congress can move toward the elimination of health inequities and improve opportunities for good health for all by including in health reform legislation provisions that:

- Sustain and support the role of traditional safety-net providers;
- Ensure access to a medical home;
- Expand community-based prevention and wellness programs;
- Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of health professionals, encourage providers to work in underserved communities, and address shortage areas, such as primary care;
- Incorporate universal adoption of cultural and linguistic competence standards in health care settings; and
- Develop a strategy and standardized measures for collecting, monitoring, and reporting data on health inequities.

These and other steps are necessary to contain health care costs, improve our health care systems, and provide the opportunity for good health for everyone in this country. I urge you to

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seize this opportunity to positively address health inequalities, improving health status for not only your constituents, but for the nation.

The Michigan League for Human Services recently published a report on health disparities in Michigan titled *Looming Cuts in Michigan's Budget Threaten to Widen the Gulf in Health Disparities*. The link to the report on our website is http://www.milhs.org/media/EDocs/HealthDisparitiesJuly2009REV4.pdf.

We hope this information is useful to you in your efforts to address health inequalities.

Sincerely,

Sharon Parks

Sharon Parks
President & CEO

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