Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 27, 2017

Norris Cochran
Acting Secretary
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Patrick Conway, MD
Acting Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Cynthia Tudor
Acting Director
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Acting Secretary Cochran, Acting Administrator Conway and Acting Director Tudor:

As you know, Puerto Rico is affected by many serious issues under federal health care policy, one of which includes the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) "Call Letter" on Medicare Advantage rates for 2018, which is due within the next week. We are writing to urge you to strengthen Puerto Rico's Medicare Advantage program in the upcoming proposed payment policies as CMS did for the 2017 plan year.

Puerto Rico is in the midst of a severe financial crisis that is placing growing hardships on the island's 3.4 million residents. The island's economic recession has caused the number of Puerto Rican residents migrating to the mainland to reach staggering levels. The situation is made worse by physician shortages, a Medicaid program facing chronic funding shortfalls, and across-the-board disparities in federal health programs, including Medicare Advantage.

The Medicare Advantage program provides quality and affordable health care coverage to over 570,000 seniors and individuals with disabilities residing in Puerto Rico, which is roughly 75 percent of eligible Medicare beneficiaries. Puerto Rico has the highest rate of Medicare Advantage enrollment in any U.S. jurisdiction, as well as the highest percentage of those eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid benefits. Yet despite its popularity, Medicare Advantage reimbursement rates to plans in Puerto Rico are much lower than in the states.

In its December 2016 report, the Congressional Task Force on Economic Growth in Puerto Rico recommended that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services consider additional administrative steps to ensure that MA plans, including those in Puerto Rico, "are being fairly and properly compensated for the services they provide to beneficiaries." You now have an opportunity to follow through on that recommendation, which was supported unanimously by the bipartisan, bicameral members of the Task Force.

We believe Medicare Advantage plays a critical role in Puerto Rico's health care system. We encourage the new Administration to build on and support action to ensure the strength and stability of the Medicare Advantage program on the island.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson
US Senator

Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress

Richard Blumenthal
US Senator

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Kirsten Gillibrand
US Senator

Stephanie D. Murphy
Member of Congress

Marco Rubio
US Senator

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Robert Menendez
US Senator

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Sean Duffy
Member of Congress

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress