September 21, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, United States Senate
117 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), I write to express our opposition to the Graham-Cassidy-Heller-Johnson Amendment to the American Health Care Act (H.R. 1628). ASCO’s core mission is to ensure that cancer patients have meaningful access to high quality cancer care. The proposal runs counter to this goal.

ASCO’s patient-centered principles for health reform support improvements to the current health care system for people with cancer. Our principles further identify specific areas where cancer patients may need additional protections. We shared these principles with Congress and the public in January of this year and use them to guide our decision-making on reform legislation, including our opposition today. ASCO calls on members of the Senate to work in a bipartisan manner to improve the health care system because we know Congress shares our belief that all people affected by cancer should receive high-quality care.

Our opposition to the Graham-Cassidy proposal stems from our concern that it will limit access to the full spectrum of cancer care services. Allowing states to obtain waivers to adjust premiums based on health status would make room for insurers to charge exorbitant premiums for patients with pre-existing conditions, including cancer survivors. Though Graham-Cassidy requires insurers to cover these conditions, it would make the coverage unattainable for Americans in waiver states.

As cancer care providers, we know the critical importance of screening services. ASCO opposes the inclusion of state waivers for essential health benefit coverage. We are further concerned by losses in coverage likely to stem from the repeal of Medicaid expansion. These coverage losses will lead to individuals with cancer being diagnosed later or not at all, negatively impacting lives and driving up costs to the health care system.

Medicaid payments should be sufficient to ensure that Medicaid patients can have access to quality cancer care. The proposal’s inclusion of a transition from traditional Medicaid to a fixed per capita cap or block grant approach will leave already struggling Medicaid programs at greater disadvantage in their ability to provide these payments.
and coverage. While variations will occur across states, the overall impact will be lower access to care for patients with cancer.

ASCO strongly opposes movement on and passage of the Graham-Cassidy proposal. We would welcome the opportunity to address health system reform that improves cancer care with you and your staff.

If you have any questions or would like assistance from ASCO on this or any issue involving the care of individuals with cancer, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Schwartz at amanda.schwartz@asco.org or 571-483-1647.

Sincerely,

Bruce E. Johnson, MD, FASCO
President, American Society of Clinical Oncology

cc:

All Members of the US Senate