

Arizona Physicians Urge Senators McCain and Flake To Oppose Graham-Cassidy Legislation

Hundreds of thousands would lose their health insurance coverage under new bill

Phoenix – Physician organizations across the state of Arizona today outlined their opposition to the Graham-Cassidy legislation in the U.S. Senate, citing the devastating impacts to the state Medicaid program, AHCCCS, and loss of health insurance coverage for thousands of patients around the state.

The letter states, “As physicians, we have taken the oath to advocate for our patients and to protect them from harm. In our capacity as leaders in the medical community we are writing to express our opposition to the Graham-Cassidy Plan; it will jeopardize health insurance coverage and access to care for hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable Arizonans —including children, women, the disabled, those with behavioral health issues, and the elderly in long-term care facilities. Paramount to this debate should be to find a solution that ensures that individuals currently covered do not become uninsured, including more than 400,000 Arizonans who have obtained coverage through the Affordable Care Act and protects the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (“AHCCCS”).”

The physician organizations represented in the letter include:

Arizona Academy of Family Physicians
Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians
Arizona Medical Association
Arizona Osteopathic Medical Association
Arizona Psychiatric Society
Arizona Section of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Maricopa County Medical Society

The full text of the letter is below and attached hereto.

Dear Senator Flake and Senator McCain:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the undersigned organizations we are writing to express our concerns regarding the Graham-Cassidy-Heller-Johnson Amendment to H.R. 1628 (“Graham-Cassidy Plan”). Together, we represent thousands of physicians who practice medicine in Arizona and care for Arizona’s most vulnerable patients.

As physicians, we have taken the oath to advocate for our patients and to protect them from harm. In our capacity as leaders in the medical community we are writing to express our opposition to the Graham-Cassidy Plan; it will jeopardize health insurance coverage and access to care for hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable Arizonans —including children, women, the disabled, those with behavioral health issues, and the elderly in long-term care facilities. Paramount to this debate should be to find a solution that ensures that individuals currently covered do not become uninsured, including more than 400,000 Arizonans who have obtained coverage through the Affordable Care Act and protects the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (“AHCCCS”).

AHCCCS, Arizona’s Medicaid program, is considered the gold standard among state Medicaid programs. It has a strong track record of being patient-centric and focused on quality, while still aggressively and

effectively accomplishing cost containment. The effects of Medicaid expansion in Arizona has made significant improvements to the health care of Arizonans. Arizona has been forward thinking in implementing high value care, with a focus on reducing costs, and improving quality of care.

The Graham-Cassidy Plan will terminate coverage for the Arizona Medicaid Expansion population, eliminate critical consumer and patient protections, dramatically reduce funding to states through block grant programs, and lead to higher premiums for many individuals – especially those with pre-existing conditions. According to an independent analysis by Avalere Health, Arizona would lose as much as \$11 billion by 2026 and up to \$133 billion through 2036 under the Graham-Cassidy Plan.

AHCCCS is already economically efficient; there are no inefficiencies to be cut. Reductions in funding will force cuts in core system components such as enrollment, benefits and payments to health care providers. These cuts threaten the vibrancy of Arizona’s healthcare sector and would result in disproportionate impacts on Arizona.

As a statewide health emergency has been declared in Arizona, we are further concerned that the Graham-Cassidy Plan will profoundly harm those affected by the opioid epidemic. The Graham-Cassidy Plan will not only cause individuals currently covered to become uninsured, but could also lead to detrimental changes in covered health benefits – making it harder to obtain necessary behavioral health services and opioid/substance abuse treatment. Amid a state of emergency, these reductions in coverage will have tremendous impacts on Arizona’s capacity to address the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic.

The Graham-Cassidy plan eliminates public health funds which are vital to the public health infrastructure of our state. The Prevention and Public Health Fund created by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, established to “provide expanded and sustained national investments in prevention and public health, to improve health outcomes, and to enhance health care quality.” These activities are key to controlling health care costs and the elimination of support for them runs counter to the goal of improving the health care system.

For these reasons, we are strongly opposed to the Graham-Cassidy Plan and urge you to vote against it.

We agree with Senator McCain’s call for regular order and urge Senators to work in a bipartisan, bicameral manner to address the challenges of healthcare reform and formulate a comprehensive strategy that improves our health care delivery system and increases access to quality, affordable health insurance. We stand ready and willing to help and provide input to help create a solution that fully addresses the needs of Arizona patients.

Respectfully,
Arizona Academy of Family Physicians
Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians
Arizona Medical Association
Arizona Osteopathic Medical Association
Arizona Psychiatric Society
Arizona Section of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
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