

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 14, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

We would like to share our strong support for ensuring access to the full continuum of medically necessary interventions for more than one-third of Americans who are currently affected by obesity. Obesity is a complex, multifactorial, and chronic disease, which requires a comprehensive approach to both prevent and treat.

Multiple large epidemiologic studies have demonstrated that increasing BMI, particularly above 30 (defined as obesity), is associated with an increased risk of premature death. This relationship holds true for various age groups, ethnic and minority populations and in different geographic locations. In addition, multiple comorbidities are either caused or worsened by obesity. Furthermore, these comorbid conditions are expected to improve or resolve if effective weight loss is achieved.

Evidence-based literature clearly demonstrates that people affected by obesity can substantially improve their health and quality of life when they have access to a continuum of medically necessary treatment – including behavioral, nutritional, pharmaceutical, psychosocial and surgical treatment. Even a 5-10% weight loss produces clinically significant reductions in risk factors for chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, arthritis, heart disease and certain cancers.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has a unique opportunity to ensure all Americans have access to the same comprehensive treatment services that members of Congress and their staff have for obesity treatment services through the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan. Through the regulatory process of the Affordable Care Act HHS should establish a comprehensive definition of “preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management” services within the essential benefits package in the Affordable Care Act to include the full continuum of medically necessary interventions, including behavioral, nutritional, pharmaceutical, psychosocial and surgical, to treat those affected by obesity.

In support of this request, please note:

- 1) Multiple comorbidities are associated with obesity such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart failure, dyslipidemia, pulmonary disease (obstructive sleep apnea and restrictive lung disease), multiple cancers, renal and liver disease, musculoskeletal disease, gastroesophageal reflux disease, psedotumor cerebri and a variety of psychosocial conditions.
- 2) The annual cost associated with obesity is \$270 billion including direct medical costs and indirect costs such as absenteeism and productivity losses.
- 3) One out of every eight deaths in America is caused by an illness directly related to obesity.
- 4) Many individuals affected by obesity often deal with physical, emotional and social issues that can hinder them from addressing their weight issues.

In light of this information, we urge the Department of Health and Human Services, as part of the regulatory process, to ensure access to the full continuum of medically necessary interventions, including behavioral, nutritional, pharmaceutical, psychosocial and surgical, to treat those affected by obesity. Individuals affected by obesity should enjoy the same coverage, regardless of the state in which they reside, the societal or genetic factors surrounding the circumstances of their obesity.

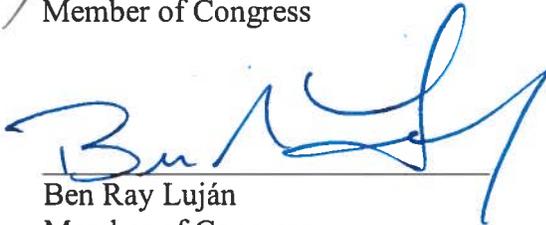
Sincerely,



Edolphus "Ed" Towns
Member of Congress



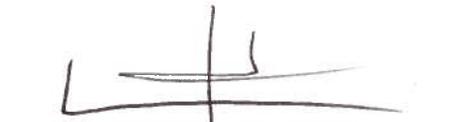
André Carson
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress



Karen R. Bass
Member of Congress



Colleen W. Hanabusa
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Martin Heinrich
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Laura Richardson
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Member of Congress

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Mike Honda
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez

Loretta Sanchez
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Eddie Bernice Johnson
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Jerrold Nadler
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James P. Moran

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Charles B. Rangel

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Donald M. Payne

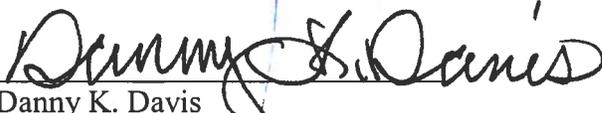
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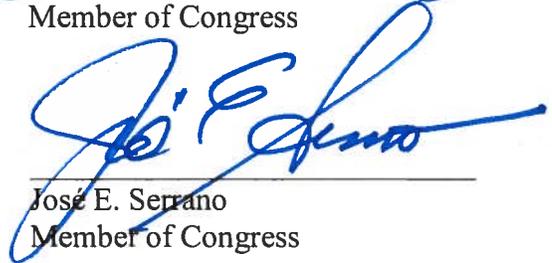
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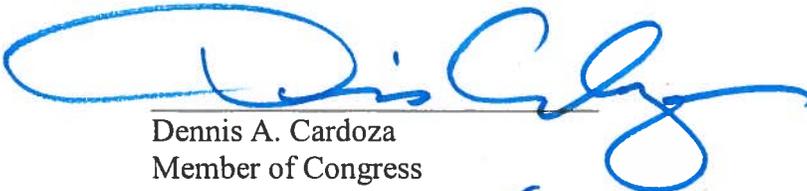
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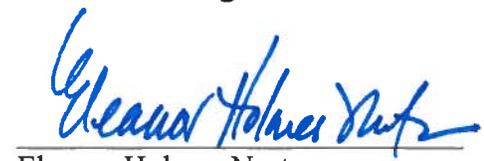
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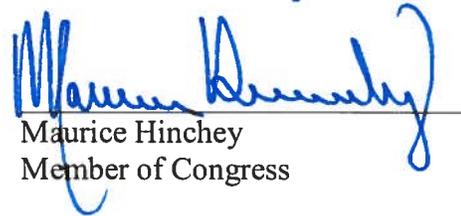

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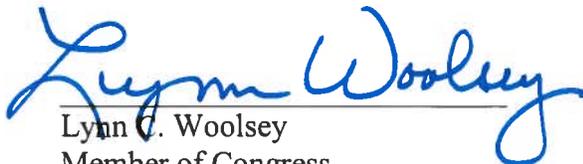

Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress

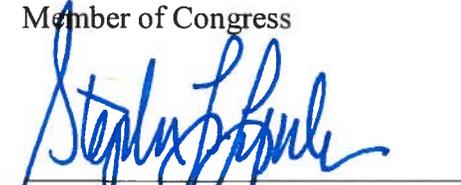

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