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Disability Community to Rally to Save Medicaid

On Thursday July 6, 2017 from 11AM-1:00PM, more than a dozen Colorado disability organizations will rally next to Senator Gardner's office at 1125 17th Street to demand that he vote NO on any bill that would risk the part of Medicaid that funds daily care for the disabled such as help with bathing, dressing, respite, assisted living, transportation and more.

These services, called Home and Community Based Services or HCBS, are provided to people in Colorado who are disabled enough that they are eligible to receive services in a more expensive and restrictive institutional setting. HCBS allows these Coloradans to live in homes and communities of their choice while saving millions in state and federal taxpayer dollars. Current congressional health care proposals aim to fundamentally alter the way these programs are financed by dramatically cutting and capping the federal share of Medicaid funds. Colorado would not be able to make up this loss of funding through state and local revenues, leaving these programs and the people they support at risk.

"HCBS services are less expensive, better for the clients and also a source of jobs, helping the economy," says Representative Dave Young, a member of the Joint Budget Committee who will speak at the rally. "Ever since Ronald Reagan signed the original law implementing HCBS, Colorado has been a leader in providing these services. However, they are optional services. If we have to find \$340 million in the Medicaid budget, I do not see how we can take that kind of hit without looking at these services, even though both Democrats and Republicans want to serve our disabled in the least restrictive setting."

Elisabeth Arenales, an attorney who is a health care expert at the Colorado Center on Law and Policy says, "the financing mechanism proposed in both the House and Senate bills in Congress is fundamentally broken. Despite saying that they want to give states more flexibility, if any version of these bills passes, states will lose flexibility because the cut in federal funds flowing to states will be so significant that their hands will be tied."

"We provide services to many people with significant developmental disabilities, some of whom have no family, others whose families are no longer able to provide the 24/7 care they need. I don't know what would happen to people that do not have the ability to care for themselves, and people that would not be appropriate for nursing facility care," says Josh Rael, Director of Alliance, a trade association of providers that serve people with developmental disabilities, another supporter of the rally.

"I became quadriplegic after being bitten by the wrong mosquito," says Curt Wolff. "Even though I had a successful corporate career and excellent health insurance, I quickly learned that only Medicaid

provides the personal care I need every day. I was able to get on the Buy-In program and because I get the help I need, I work and pay a premium to keep my Medicaid. I believe in limited government, but there are some things government should do. Medicaid is essential to our life and liberty.”

Colorado’s Medicaid program serves over 130,000 disabled and elderly citizens. More than half of these individuals are in optional programs that are likely to be first on the chopping block if Congressional health care proposals pass as written.