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Consumer Advocates Blast the Latest Changes to ACA Repeal Bill

(Madison, WI)—As House Republican leaders and the President try to find more votes for the controversial bill to repeal and partially replace the Affordable Care Act, they have ignited a new wave of concerns among groups representing health care consumers.

Speaker Ryan said Thursday evening that the revised bill he plans to bring to the House floor on Friday will repeal the requirement that all health insurance plans cover “essential health benefits.” That part of the Affordable Care Act requires coverage of 10 categories of health benefits, including maternity care, prescription drugs, hospitalization, and mental health services.

Advocates for consumers are concerned that the latest change to the House Republican plan will reduce the quality of many insurance plans and will substantially increase costs for many people, including women and people needing mental health services.

Bobby Peterson, Executive Director of ABC for Health, said the new amendment contradicts Speaker Ryan’s assurances that the “repeal and replace” bill would only affect a small percentage of Americans. “Contrary to Speaker Ryan’s claim that few people would be adversely affected by the House bill, the changes unveiled at the eleventh hour are likely to reduce benefits for most Wisconsinites,” Peterson said.

Consumer advocates expect repeal of essential health benefits to trigger a “race to the bottom,” with insurers dropping coverage of many more expensive benefits, such as coverage of chemotherapy and high-cost drugs, to discourage enrollment by sicker, more costly individuals.

Jon Peacock, research director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, said the anticipated reduction in health services covered could be especially harmful for the nearly 2.5 million Wisconsinites who have pre-existing conditions. “As insurers scale back their benefits and try to target the healthiest individuals, many people with pre-existing conditions would not be able to get the coverage they need at any price, much less an affordable one.”

Women's groups are also very concerned about the bill and the latest amendments. "The Republican plan to replace the ACA will be devastating to women across the country," noted Sara Finger, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health. "Among the many dangerous ways the House bill will hurt the health and lives of millions, it forces women to pay more for maternity care all while making it harder to plan and space pregnancies."

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The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a multi-issue policy research and advocacy organization promoting statewide policies that ensure a safe and healthy future for every child in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.wccf.org.