



Association Of State And Territorial Health Officials
2231 Crystal Drive, Suite 450 | Arlington, Virginia 22202
(202) 371-9090 | www.astho.org

July 17, 2009

The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chairman
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2322A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel, Chairman
Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dave Camp, Ranking Member
Ways and Means Committee
1139E Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard McKeon, Ranking
Member
Education and Labor Committee
2101 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of state and territorial health departments, we are writing to express our strong support for the public health prevention and workforce development provisions of the America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009. Investing in state and territorial public health systems is a direct investment in the health and wellness of the American people. The goal of public health is to foster a nation of healthy people, creating a more productive workforce that will help strengthen the American economy. A 21st Century U.S. health system must include universal access to public health services that protect the health of all Americans throughout their lives, in turn lessening the burden of medical costs for intensive treatment for chronic diseases.

At a time when our nation is facing new public health threats such as the H1N1 novel influenza virus, governmental public health agencies are struggling to diligently carry out their core responsibilities with a workforce that has lost over 11,000 employees in the last year, with thousands more lost jobs expected this year. The workforce recruitment and retention provisions in Division C will provide a tremendous impetus to attract critically needed public health workers through incentives such as scholarships and loan repayment in return for service in governmental health departments.

Improving the health of our nation will require more than access to a doctor's office, hospital or clinic. As a nation, we cannot realize the full benefit of investments in health without a commensurate investment in population-based, public health prevention systems. Through a variety of state and community-based approaches, these programs can prevent disease, illness and injury before they occur, and reduce the financial burden on our health care system. Division C provides needed investments in a new Prevention and Wellness Trust that will support state and local public health prevention programs in a comprehensive approach to ensure that all Americans, regardless of where they live, can have access to the information and support they need to improve their health and that of their families. The bill requires the creation of a National Prevention and Wellness Strategy and establishes new grant programs that will

strengthen core public health infrastructure as well as enhance delivery of prevention and wellness services grants.

The bill also includes a critical provision that allows Vaccines for Children Act funds to be used at public health clinics to expand access to childhood vaccines that saves thousands of lives and prevents many hospitalizations and illnesses.

We look forward to working with you and your Senate colleagues to resolve some of the differences between the House and Senate bills, and to lend our strong support to your efforts towards enactment of one of the most important pieces of legislation of our time.

Sincerely,

Paul E Jarris, MD

Paul Jarris, MD, MBA
Executive Director
The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials