Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 30, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma,

Like many Americans, Oregonians have confronted enormous hardship this year. The COVID-19 pandemic and historic wildfires have devastated thousands of Oregon families, leaving many to face irreparable loss, homelessness, and the loss of jobs and financial security. In light of this severe disruption, we are concerned that many Oregonians will not have the opportunity to enroll in coverage for 2021 before the end of Open Enrollment, which is currently scheduled to close on December 15, 2020. We urge you to approve Governor Brown's request to extend Open Enrollment for the Health Insurance Marketplace through December 31, 2020 to ensure that Oregonians have the opportunity to enroll in affordable health coverage and protect themselves and their families while the COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe health and economic consequences for Oregon. To date, nearly 60,000 Oregonians have been diagnosed with COVID-19, over 700 lost their lives, and 145,000 remain jobless.[1] The crisis is also far from over: around 1,000 new cases of COVID-19 are being reported each day, and over 50,000 Oregonians have filed new unemployment claims since the beginning of September.[2] This makes ensuring access to health coverage more critical now than ever as families continue to grapple with the effects of the virus on their health and livelihoods.

At the same time, thousands of Oregonians have become displaced or homeless as a result of wildfires that raged across the state earlier this fall. Over 2,000 wildfires led to evacuation orders

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[1] https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2020/10/oregon-insight-layoffs-are-few-but-jobless-claims-remain-stubbornly-high.html; https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/oregon-coronavirus-cases.html
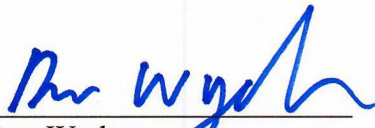[2] https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/11/coronavirus-in-oregon-state-reports-935-cases-second-highest-daily-death-toll-since-pandemic-began.html; https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/claims.asp

affecting 500,000 Oregonians, destroyed more than 4,000 homes, and led to 24,000 claims for public assistance.[3] This severe disruption could easily undermine individuals' ability to enroll in health coverage by the scheduled close of open enrollment on December 15th, rendering them vulnerable to further economic hardship if they need medical care.
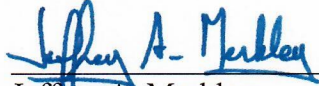
We understand that many Oregonians may be able to enroll in coverage through a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) after experiencing coverage losses and enrollment delays due to COVID-19 or the wildfires. While this SEP will be essential for helping many Oregonians access health insurance, an extended Open Enrollment period is necessary to ensure that Oregonians have the opportunity to secure coverage for 2021. Without this extension, many Oregonians could simply remain uninsured, making it more difficult for them to access the care they need and to protect their families from medical debt.

Extending the Open Enrollment period through December 31st is critical to protecting the health and wellbeing of Oregonians and all Americans. We urge you to take this step immediately to ensure people have access to the affordable and comprehensive health coverage during these unprecedented times. Thank you for your attention to this important request.
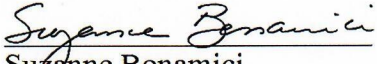
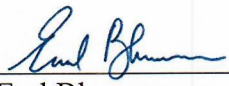Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Peter A. DeFazio
United States Representative

Suzanne Bonamici
United States Representative

Earl Blumenauer
United States Representative

Greg Walden
United States Representative

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[3] https://www.kxl.com/pacific-nw-wildfires-2020/