NASW
National Association of Social Workers

November 3, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, (NASW) and our 150,000 members, I write to strongly commend you and your colleagues for introducing H.R. 3962, the "Affordable Health Care for America Act of 2009." Professional social workers have a broad perspective on the range of physical, social, emotional, and environmental factors that impact the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Social workers often practice as part of health care teams because they are specifically trained to address the psychosocial implications of acute and chronic illnesses, and they are the largest providers of mental health services in the United States. They practice across the continuum of care including community and public health clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, home health care, primary care, veteran service networks, and hospices.

NASW and its members are long-time advocates for major health care reform. We have carried the vision of former Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, a pioneer in the social work profession, who included universal health care on the 12-item agenda she brought to President Roosevelt. This was the only item on her agenda that did not pass into law and social workers have actively sought health care reform since that time.

HR 3962 is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when Members of Congress work together to do what is best for the people they represent. It provides more affordable, quality coverage for all, calls for shared responsibility by individuals, employers and government, and expands health insurance coverage choices, including being able to retain one's current coverage, having additional private plan options, and offering a public health insurance option designed to lower costs and keep insurance companies accountable.

In particular, social workers are pleased that H.R. 3962:

- Promises to extend coverage to approximately 36 million Americans largely through health insurance market reforms and expansion of Medicaid eligibility;
- Includes addiction and mental health care in the minimum benefits package, in addition to applying the Wellstone Domenici parity law standard to all qualified health plans;
- Recognizes that fundamental system reforms, such as making improvements to better coordinate care, are necessary to the success of broader health system reforms;

- Extends for two years the restoration of rate cuts in Medicare outpatient psychotherapy services, which will help maintain the viability of the Medicare outpatient mental health benefit.
- Authorizes Medicare payments for clinical social workers to bill independently for services to certain beneficiaries staying in skilled nursing facilities, helping these residents to obtain badly needed mental health services.
- Raises Medicaid eligibility to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, thereby extending coverage to millions of residents who are currently uninsured, among them childless single adults.
- Begins to address health professions workforce concerns;
- Addresses health inequities and seeks to reduce and eliminate health and health care disparities
- Includes prevention and wellness initiatives designed to keep Americans healthy; and
- Includes essential health insurance reforms such as eliminating coverage denials based on pre-existing conditions.

NASW pledges to work with House members and the Leadership to support passage of this legislation to expand access to high quality, affordable health care for all Americans and to complete the agenda of Secretary Perkins.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH
Executive Director