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October 15, 2009

The Honorable Benjamin Cardin
U.S. Senate
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

The National Health Equity Coalition (NHEC), a policy and advocacy network committed to the elimination of racial and ethnic health disparities and the achievement of health equity, strongly support your amendment to codify the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH) in health reform legislation.

Inequalities in health status and health care exact a huge human and economic toll on the nation. Their persistence means that millions of Americans and their families suffer needlessly from a disproportionately higher burden of illness and mortality. According to a recent report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, from 2003 to 2006 disparities in health care and health outcomes cost our nation an estimated \$1.24 trillion in excess spending and lost productivity. In those four years, eliminating certain health disparities would have reduced direct health care expenditures by \$229.4 billion. With projections indicating that nearly 1 in 2 people living in the U.S. by mid-century will be a person of color, the health of our nation and the cost of our health system clearly depend on our ability to improve the health of our fastest-growing communities.

OMH is critical to protecting and improving the health of racial and ethnic minority populations and to eliminating health disparities. The office advises the Secretary of HHS on public health programs and activities that affect racial and ethnic minority populations, coordinates educational campaigns, and supports research and demonstration projects on effective strategies to reduce health disparities. Codification, as well as an adequate authorization, would ensure OMH has the authority and resources to continue and expand this important work.

We greatly appreciate your leadership in introducing this amendment in health reform legislation. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to further support your efforts on this and other health equity issues this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Galloway-Gilliam', is placed over a light blue rectangular background.

Lark Galloway-Gilliam
Coordinator