

June 22, 2009

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
The United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Via Fax: 202-224-2852

RE: S. 700 - Support

Dear Senator Bingaman,

We are writing on behalf of the Disability Rights Legal Center to thank you for sponsoring S. 700, which proposes to amend the Social Security Act to reduce lengthy disabled individuals' waiting periods in order to receive Medicare benefits.

Through our Cancer Legal Resource Center (CLRC), we have unique knowledge and experience with laws and legislation that impact the rights of individuals diagnosed with cancer, cancer survivors, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and employers.

By way of introduction, the Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC) has worked to implement the civil rights of people with disabilities for over 30 years. We are the oldest cross-disability legal advocacy organization in the country. Our mission is to promote the rights of people with disabilities and the public interest in, and awareness of, those rights by providing legal and related services. The CLRC, a joint program of the DLRC and Loyola Law School, has provided over 90,000 people with free and confidential information and resources on cancer-related legal issues, including access to care, insurance, government benefits, estate planning, and employment. Please visit www.CancerLegalResourceCenter.org for more information.

Time is essential for people with medical disabilities and serious health conditions. In the last 6 years, the CLRC's Telephone Assistance Line has received over a number of calls from people who are losing time due to Medicare waiting periods in order to utilize benefits towards their health conditions.

For example, a woman from San Diego, California contacted the CLRC on behalf of her 64-year old husband who is bed-ridden and aphasic. They were told that there would be at least five months of waiting before they got to see any amount of disability benefits, and that this was the expedited wait period. Not only that, but the woman herself has a medical disability, and only 55% of her salary is replaced by benefits. This is not enough to help the couple survive.

Another woman, from Riverside, California also contacted the CLRC. Her health insurance is covered through Cobra and, although she needs more financial assistance, there is a two year waiting period for her to be eligible for Medicare coverage. How can a person be expected to wait so long and survive?

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This lack of resources has devastating consequences: someone whose chance of living is that based on a price ought to have the same opportunity to live as an individual who can afford health insurance.

The DRLC supports S. 700, and we look forward to working with you to ensure the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,



Paula D. Pearlman, Esq.
Executive Director,
Disability Rights Legal Center



Joanna L. Morales, Esq.
Director,
Cancer Legal Resource Center