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House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2015

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Marilyn Tavenner
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 314 G Humphrey Building
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Ms. Tavenner,

For years, privacy advocates, consumers, and members of Congress have demanded that Social Security numbers be removed from Medicare beneficiary cards. Despite a clear need to adopt this commonsense protection, this change has not yet taken place.

With the continued rise in identity theft committed with stolen Social Security numbers, it is difficult to justify why this sensitive information should remain on Medicare beneficiary cards. Most Americans take great care throughout their lives to protect their Social Security number from being compromised. Yet this lifelong effort is suddenly disregarded once enrolling in Medicare. Today, 50 million Americans are uniquely exposed to possible identity theft due to the inaction of CMS on this issue. As more and more Americans approach retirement age, this threat will only continue to grow.

As you know, in 2006 CMS issued a report on this issue, concluding that removing Social Security numbers from Medicare beneficiary cards would be costly and require "extensive planning." I know that implementing a new system will be challenging. Helping providers transition to a new unique identifier for beneficiaries is a significant undertaking. Yet, I fail to see why – at a minimum -- the first step of issuing all new Medicare beneficiaries a Health Insurance Claim Number distinct from their Social Security number would significantly add to the administrative burden assumed by CMS, claims processors, auditors, and providers. It has been eight years since the release of this CMS report, and that is ample time for the extensive planning to have occurred.

I would appreciate if you could provide me an update regarding the progress made in changing from the Social Security number-based cards since our correspondence on this topic in 2013. I would expect that this update include the timeline for effecting this important change, a summary of progress made on the new cost estimate for making this shift, and if any action by Congress could help expedite this process.

Ms. Marilyn Tavenner
January 28, 2015
Page 2 of 2

As you prepare to transition out of your role as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, I would like to thank you for your service to the economic security of all Americans as the leader of these vital programs. It is my hope that you would convey the importance of the privacy and security of Medicare beneficiaries, and the prevention of improper payments to your successor. You have the opportunity to leave CMS with a concrete plan to remove Social Security numbers from Medicare beneficiary cards, I respectfully request that you do so.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Deutch", written in a cursive style.

Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS