

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2006

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**KENNEDY, COLLEAGUES URGE PRESIDENT BUSH TO KEEP MEDICARE PART D
TRANSITION POLICY IN PLACE**

April 1st deadline seeks to undermine seniors and their attempt to find a plan that works

Washington, D.C.—Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, joined by his Democratic colleagues, sent the following letter to the President Bush, urging him to reverse the decision to end the Medicare Part D transition policy that expires tomorrow, April 1, 2006.

Senator Kennedy said, “America’s seniors and the disabled have had months of headaches since the prescription drug program was enacted and now the Administration wants to end the transition policy that was meant to simplify this mess. Seniors are facing mountains of paperwork and countless hours on the phone to navigate this system, and we ought to help them in any way possible to ensure they’re getting the prescription drug coverage they need and deserve.”

Under the transition policy, plans were required to provide coverage during the transition period even if the drug was not on the plan’s formulary. The transition period was originally created to last for one month, but was extended to April 1st due to the chaotic start of the Administration’s prescription drug program.

The transition period was intended to give Medicare beneficiaries time to find a drug plan that covered their needed prescription drugs, or to request an exception from non-coverage for a medically necessary drug. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has said that plans need to educate seniors about their options when the transition ends, including appeal rights, changing plans, or changing prescription drugs. But neither CMS nor the plans have done this, and many of the problems seniors and the disabled have had in getting the drugs they need when the plan began in January are likely to again occur since the underlying problems with the program have not been addressed.

The text of the letter and its signatories are included below.

March 28, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We’re writing to express our deep concern that on April 1st, the Administration is planning to end its transition policy that requires insurance companies to cover the prescription drugs needed by seniors and disabled persons enrolled in Medicare. Medicare beneficiaries across America still have had great difficulty under the Part D drug program obtaining drugs they need, and are often forced to pay unaffordable prices for their prescriptions.

The transition policy has helped Medicare beneficiaries obtain the prescription drugs they need, since so many of the underlying problems in the Part D program have not yet been solved.

We're very concerned that many elderly and disabled citizens will not be able to obtain the drugs they desperately need if the transition policy ends. Many will not even learn their drugs are no longer covered until they go to their pharmacy to fill a prescription and are turned away. There has still been little or no education as to what happens when the transition policy ends, including how to file appeals.

The Administration should be doing all it can to improve the new Medicare drug program, not take decisions that will worsen the crisis. We therefore urge you to reverse the decision to end the transition policy. Seniors deserve a Medicare drug program which is effective and comprehensive, and that goal will be undermined if this decision is not reversed.

Sincerely,

Signed:

Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Senator John Kerry
Senator Christopher Dodd
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Frank Lautenberg
Senator John Rockefeller
Senator Hillary Clinton
Senator Patrick Leahy
Senator Herb Kohl
Senator Russell Feingold

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