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December 9, 2020

Ms. Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, Co-Chair

Mr. Robert Gordon, Co-Chair

Department of Health and Human Services Biden-Harris Transition Team Members

RE: Key Characteristics of Health and Human Services (HHS) agency heads and other key health leadership roles

Dear Ms. Brooks-LaSure, Mr. Gordon and Department of Health and Human Services Transition Team Members,

As advocacy organizations committed to advancing racial justice and health equity, we write to both congratulate the Biden-Harris team on your victory and to provide you with our recommendations for the important work of filling key roles that will steer the administration's health agenda.

First, we applaud the nomination of Attorney General Xavier Becerra for Secretary of Health and Human Services. Attorney General Becerra is a demonstrated champion of quality, affordable health care, immigrant rights, and of the principles of equity and justice upon which our health system must be based. As you continue to seek out high-quality candidates for health leadership roles in the Biden-Harris administration, we urge you to prioritize the values, experience and expertise below.

Each of our organizations plays a role advocating for equitable access to high-quality health care and good health. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the deep inequities that confront our nation. If these inequities are not properly addressed through bold structural policy change, our nation will continue to fail the very people who make it whole.

The COVID-19 virus does not discriminate, but some people are being hit especially hard – particularly people of color. Data shows that Black, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander communities face alarming rates of infection and death throughout the country alongside other groups who face unfair barriers to health and economic security, including Latinx communities, Asian communities, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, people with disabilities, older adults and every intersection thereof. Our collective advocacy has worked to amplify what needs to change in order to dismantle the longstanding barriers baked into our policies, programs and safety-net structures, and to promote health equity. We recognize this moment as an inflection point for our country, and we applaud the incoming Biden-Harris administration's stated commitment to pursuing justice and equity for all people.

In selecting additional nominees and appointees for health agency heads and other key health leadership roles, the incoming Biden-Harris administration has a tremendous opportunity to refocus our national priorities to ensure our health system serves all people, especially those

who have been systemically locked out of resources and services. Our next Secretary of HHS and CDC administrator, along with yet unnamed CMS Administrator, Medicaid Director, FDA Director, HRSA Director and other agency heads, will have their hands full undoing both the harms the Trump administration inflicted and those that have developed over decades due to lingering discrimination and neglect. They will also have more immediate responsibilities for building on the successes of previous administrations and moving our health system toward more equitable, more affordable, and more universal coverage and access.

The ability to hit the ground running on these priorities is perhaps the most vital characteristic for each of these positions. However, it is particularly important for your incoming administration with the looming COVID-19 crisis and its ripple effects straining nearly every aspect of our health system. In addition to preparedness, we urge you to consider the following characteristics in your potential nominees and appointees for remaining posts in the incoming administration:

- a documented commitment to racial justice and health equity;
- a background or history of leadership in consumer advocacy;
- exceptional understanding and history of administering robust Medicaid programs;
- a history of successful leadership on issues specifically and/or disproportionately impacting communities of color, specifically Black, Indigenous and immigrant communities;
- demonstrated support for LGBTQ+ rights, particularly in health care settings;
- demonstrated support for reproductive health access, including abortion and contraceptive health access;
- a documented commitment to ending gender-based discrimination in health access and coverage and achieving gender equity in health care across the lifespan;
- a commitment to protecting and building on the ACA including in areas of affordability, private insurance regulation, support for rural hospitals and telehealth services, civil rights, and innovation, including those innovations that seek specifically to enhance the quality of and access to care for people with disabilities and older adults such as home and community-based services, people facing substance use and mental health conditions, children with complex medical conditions and transgender people;
- a plan and commitment to both reversing anti-immigrant policies including public charge rules and non-discrimination protections for people with limited English proficiency and to rebuilding trust between immigrant communities and our health systems; and
- reflects the rich diversity of the country they will serve.

Nominees and appointees for health leadership roles who possess these characteristics—in whole or in part—backed by the refreshingly proactive measures the Biden-Harris transition team is taking to address health access and control the COVID-19 crisis, will be well-positioned to move our health care system forward with the needs of historically under-resourced communities at the center.

We look forward to working with you and the entire incoming administration to protect consumers' health security and the programs that play a critical role in ensuring all people have access to high-quality, affordable health coverage in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Community Catalyst

AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families

AIDS Foundation Chicago

Alabama Arise

American Medical Student Association

Autism Society of America

Bienestar Human Services

Black Women's Health Imperative

Breast Cancer Action

Caring Across Generations

Center for Health Progress

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Popular Democracy Action

Center for Public Representation

Centro de Comunidad y Justicia

Children's Action Alliance

Citizen Action of Wisconsin

City of Milwaukee Health Department

Colorado Children's Campaign

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative

Community Enabler

Community Life Links

Consumers for Affordable Health Care

Desert AIDS Project

Divine Truth Unity Fellowship Social Justice Ministries

Edwards Healthcare Consulting LLC.

El Centro Inc.

End Hep C SF

Face to Face/Sonoma County AIDS Network

Families USA

Family Voices of Tennessee

Florida Policy Institute

Georgia Equality

Georgia Watch

Georgians for a Healthy Future
Health Access California
Health Care For All - Massachusetts
Health Equity Initiatives LLC
Health Equity Solutions
Health Leads
Human Impact Partners
Iris House, Inc.
Justice in Aging
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Kentucky Voices for Health
Kids Forward
Legal Council for Health Justice
Louisiana Consumer Healthcare Coalition
March for Moms
Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition
Micronesian Islander Community
Mississippi Health Advocacy Program
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Social Workers
National Birth Equity Collaborative
National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Women's Law Center
NC Child
Nebraska Appleseed
New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN)
Northwest Health Law Advocates
Pennsylvania Health Access Network
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Positive Women's Network-USA
R2H Action (Right to Health)
Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance

Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
RESULTS

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center

TakeAction Minnesota

Tennessee Disability Coalition

Tennessee Justice Center

The Arc of the United States

The Source LGBT+ Center

Transgender Law Center (TLC)

University of Massachusetts-Amherst

University of Michigan School of Public Health

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Utah Health Policy Project

Voices for Progress

Voices for Virginia's Children

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

Women Organized to Respond to Life Threatening Diseases (WORLD)

WV Citizen Action Education Fund

Young Invincibles