

Senator Mazie Hirono
730 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Colleen Hanabusa
422 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Hirono and Representative Hanabusa:

As organizations that care deeply about improving the health of Pacific Islanders, we write in support of the **Covering our FAS Allies (COFA) Act**. We believe that Congress must restore Medicaid coverage for communities lawfully residing in the United States under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) between the U.S. and the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. This legislation would restore that coverage.

Under the agreement with the U.S., COFA communities are granted broad migration rights to live and work in the U.S. in exchange for U.S. use of and access to strategic military defense points for missile testing and space operations in the Freely Associated States. Before 1996, those residing in the U.S. under COFA had access to Medicaid through their designation as legally residing non-citizen nationals. Unfortunately, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) stripped COFA communities of their eligibility for most means-tested federal benefits, including Medicaid, by unintentionally excluding them from the category of “qualified immigrants” for purposes of eligibility.

As a result, the over 56,000 COFA individuals and families living in the U.S. have struggled to access essential care and the same programs their tax dollars support. Many, due to the effects of US military activity, such as nuclear test bombings, face serious chronic conditions and health disparities. In the absence of federal support, states with large COFA populations face an increasing challenge in how to provide affordable care to these communities. Since states cannot use federal Medicaid funds to cover COFA communities like other vulnerable groups, the burden falls on hard working individuals, families and community health care providers. The federal government must stand by its commitments by re-designating COFA migrants as “qualified immigrants” for purposes of Medicaid eligibility.

Therefore, we applaud this legislation, which builds on your continuing advocacy on behalf of COFA communities. The COFA Act will correct the injustice of PRWORA to restore access to Medicaid for COFA communities. In particular, the bill would:

- Provide an exception to the 5-year limited eligibility provision with respect to Medicaid, for COFA migrants lawfully residing in the U.S.
- Provide that restrictions to federal public benefit programs do not apply to individuals lawfully residing in the U.S. under the COFA agreement.
- Provide clarity that individuals from the Freely Associated States lawfully residing in the U.S. are Qualified Aliens for purposes of Medicaid eligibility.

Restoring Medicaid benefits to COFA communities is a welcome step forward to eliminating a 20-year injustice that has put the health of COFA communities at risk. Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
ADAP Advocacy Association (aaa+)
AFSCME
Aging Life Care Association®
American Public Health Association
Asian American Psychological Association
Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center, Inc.
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership (APPEAL)
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Cancer Council of the Pacific Islands
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Reproductive Rights
Community Access National Network (CANN)
Community Catalyst
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
Families USA
Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
Latino Commission on AIDS
NAACP
NAPAFASA
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians
National Council of Jewish Women
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women

National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Alliance
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
NMAC
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

State and Local Organizations

Arizona

Asian Pacific Community in Action
Tucson Marshallese communities

Arkansas

Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese
Marshallese Educational Initiative
NWA Workers' Justice Center
Single Parent Scholarship Fund NWA

California

Ahahui 'o Lili'uokalani Hawaiian Civic Club of Southern California
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
KAHA I KA PANOA KALEPONI HAWAIIAN CIVIC CLUB
Marshallese Community of Sacramento
SAMOAN National Nurses Association
Taulama for Tongans
TOFA Inc
Victor Kaiwi Pang, CEO, Chair

District of Columbia

Ke Ali'i Maka`ainana Hawaiian Civic Club of Washington, D.C.

Hawaii

CHOW Project
Chuuk Language and Cultural Association of Hawaii, Inc.
CofaCan
Gregory House Programs
Hawaii Public Health Association

Hep Free Hawaii
Kalihi-Palama Health Center
Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services
Kosrae Hilo Organization
Marshallese Education Day Committee
Micronesia Connections, University of Hawaii at Manoa
Micronesian Health Advisory Coalition
Nations of Micronesia Committee
Progressive Democrats of Hawaii
Save Medicaid Hawaii
Suka Pacific LLC
The Eyes-of-the Reef
University of Hawaii Department of OB/GYN
Waikiki Health

Illinois

Asian Health Coalition

Louisiana

VAYLA New Orleans

Maine

Maine Equal Justice Partners

Massachusetts

Asian Women for Health
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Minnesota

Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota

Mississippi

Steps Coalition

New Jersey

New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.

New York

Apicha Community Health Center
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Korean Community Services of Metropolitan NY
New York Immigration Coalition
New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage

Ohio

Asian Services in Action, Inc.

Diversified Health Management
Hmong Ohio of Tomorrow
Ohio Asian American Health Coalition

Oklahoma

Micronesian Coalition

Oregon

Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)
COFA Alliance National Network
Micronesian Islander Community
Multnomah County Health Department
Oregon COFA (Compact of Free Association) Project
Pacific Islander Coalition
Salem Keizer Coalition for Equality
The Insurance Coach, LLC

Pennsylvania

Health Care for All Philadelphia

Tennessee

Hui Hawaii O`Tenesi Hawaiian Civic Club

Texas

Asian American Health Coalition
CENTEX 969 of CANN, TEXAS

Utah

Kauwahi Anaina Hawaiian Civic Club Provo
National Tongan American Society
Utah Pacific Islander Civic Engagement Coalition

Washington

Children's Alliance
Foundation for Healthy Generations
Marshallese Community In King and South King Counties
Northwest Health Law Advocates
The Charis Clinic PLLC