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Avoiding False Choices: Preserving the Entire Health Care Safety-Net is Essential

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Oakland, CA – Alameda County’s Fight for Medi-Cal Statement on Federal Budget Negotiations and Tax Reform

Our health is our wealth. As Congress rushes to seal deals on the federal budget and tax reform, we must insist they avoid false choices between health programs worth “saving” and those not. The agencies and services that make up our health care safety-net constitute an integrated whole reflective of our communities’ values and commitments. When Congress pulls apart threads to make short-term deals, they create gaps in the safety-net that undermine community health and drive up costs in the long-term.

Right now, Congress is hurrying to pass tax reform legislation by Thanksgiving. This creates fertile ground for devastating trade-offs – drastic cuts to Medicaid and Medicare and an increase in the number of uninsured to pay for tax cuts. The [House’s tax reform plan](#) adds \$1.5 trillion to the deficit to pay for tax cuts targeted to the richest 1% and corporations. The latest Senate tax plan would eliminate the individual mandate, a cornerstone of the Affordable Care Act, leaving 13 million people uninsured.

Last week, the House passed the [Championing Healthy Kids Act](#) to fund critical safety-net programs like Community Health Centers (CHCs) and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through offsets that would slash the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF). The price for this deal is too steep. Repurposing \$6.35 billion from PPHF would gut critical public health services such as immunizations and chronic disease prevention. These services are essential to managing our timely response to public health emergencies like the recent Hepatitis A outbreak in California. Destabilizing public health to fund health care makes no sense. It endangers lives and drives up costs.

After missing budget reauthorization deadlines, Congress is facing pressure to fix “funding cliffs” for programs like CHCs and CHIP. Without funding reauthorization, health centers in the Alameda County Health Consortium are facing a \$19 million dollar loss that will leave 20,000 of our neighbors without access to care and shut down six or more health center sites.

Our hospitals’ ability to keep our communities safe is also being threatened. Budget hawks have set their sights on Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funding that covers the many remaining uninsured. DSH helps hospitals, like those in the Alameda Health System (AHS), provide care to uninsured patients which would otherwise be uncompensated—in 2017, AHS provided \$75 million in uncompensated care. The DSH payment reductions must be delayed, as 3 million Californians still are currently without coverage, and AHS funding for uncompensated care threatens to be cut by \$11 million in the coming year.

Stealing from Peter to pay Paul, not only makes for bad economics, it goes against the values that underpin budgets. Americans value health care. National polls and three failed attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act attest to this. As

we find ourselves defending critical programs that protect our communities and help them thrive, let's not fall victim to false choices. Let's focus on defending our collective values to build and maintain a quality health care system accessible to all.

The [Fight for Medi-Cal Campaign](#) is a regional campaign created by Alameda County Board President Wilma Chan for Alameda County residents to share their stories, find resources, and join together to send the message to Congress that Alameda County opposes cuts or caps to Medicaid and repeal of the Affordable Care Act.