

March 14, 2000

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), representing over 116,000 physicians who specialize in internal medicine and medical students, I am writing to reiterate our strong support for H.R. 1304, the "Quality Health Care Coalition Act of 1999." This legislation would allow physicians who practice independently to negotiate collectively with large managed care organizations regarding contract terms that affect patient care.

This legislation is extremely important to our members who consistently find themselves at the negotiating table with no real ability to negotiate contract terms. As you know, the health care industry recently has seen a significant concentration of health plans: in the past four years the 18 leading health insurers have combined into six. Wellpoint's proposal to purchase Aetna would lead to an even greater concentration of market power in the hands of a few giant health plans who are in a position to dictate egregious contract terms that put profits over patients and hinder physicians' ability to provide high quality care.

It is estimated that over half of physicians are in solo practice or are small group owners. Due to the nature of their practice as independent physicians, they are at a great disadvantage when negotiating contracts with a large health plan. This legislation is necessary to level the playing field. H.R. 1304 would provide limited relief from the antitrust laws for all health care professionals by simply allowing them to negotiate fair contracts with health plans. This bill would not force health plans to accept terms and conditions sought by health care professionals, and it would forbid strikes.

Thank you for co-sponsoring H.R. 1304. Physicians need H.R. 1304 to restore their ability to effectively advocate for the quality of care their patients need and deserve. We are counting on your support when this bill is marked up in committee and moves to the floor for a vote.

Sincerely,

Whitney W. Addington, M.D., FACP
President