June 5, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell   The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader      Minority Leader
United States Senate     United States Senate
S-221 Capitol Building     S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510    Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As the United States Senate begins the process of drafting legislation to accompany H.R. 1628, the American Healthcare Act (AHCA), the organizations signed below are asking for your support in preserving coverage for a comprehensive eye examination for children as well as preventive health services, including vision screenings, as defined under the Affordable Care Act (ACA)’s essential health benefits (EHB). Vision impairments and eye disorders are the 3rd leading chronic condition among children with costs for direct medical care, vision aids and devices, and caregivers amounting to $10 billion per year. Our nation’s families are shouldering 45% of these costs. Common childhood eye disorders and vision impairments are easily treatable if caught early; however, as written, the AHCA jeopardizes early detection and cost-effective treatments that could prevent lifelong vision impairment and result in permanent loss of vision.

Eyesight and vision are intrinsically linked to early childhood development processes, including cognitive and motor function, socialization, and psychological development. In addition, optical correction of significant refractive error can result in improved school readiness and avoid deficits in literacy for pre-school aged children as they enter grade school. Because young children and their parents may not be aware of reduced visual function, vision screenings and eye examinations as provided under current EHB requirements are vital for detecting problems before development and learning ability are compromised.

We are furthermore concerned that an insurmountable burden would be placed on state public health infrastructure in the absence of national policies that support and prioritize preventive measures. In September 2016, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) released a report (“Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow”) that recognizes that for too long vision and eye health have not received the attention and investment they warrant, given their importance to public health. Without the existing mechanisms in the EHBs in place to ensure that children can receive critical vision screenings and access eye examinations regardless of social or economic status, this significant public health oversight will continue to impact our nation’s children.

We urge the Senate to preserve the children’s vision coverage as currently defined under the ACA’s EHB. Prevention is a critical element in a strong public health infrastructure, and we ask that the Senate work to preserve the ability for children to receive eye and vision health services that establish a foundation for healthy development, school readiness, and lifelong vision health.

Sincerely,

American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology & Strabismus
Alabama Lions Sight Conservation Association
Alabama Vision Coalition
Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Montefiore Medical Center  
American Academy of Optometry  
American Council of the Blind  
American Council of the Blind of Nebraska  
American Council of the Blind of New York  
American Foundation for the Blind  
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology  
Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Blair/Clearfield Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services  
Bright Focus Foundation  
Bucks County Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Byers Eye Institute at Stanford University  
Cahaba Valley Health Care  
Capital Area Guide Dog Users Inc  
Center for the Visually Impaired  
Center for Vision Loss  
Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank  
Central Susquehanna Sight Services, Inc.  
Combat Blindness International  
Community Services for Sight  
Council of Citizens with Low Vision International  
DeLand Lions Club  
Department of Ophthalmology, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University  
Department of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital at Montefiore  
Eye Bank Association of America  
EyeSight Foundation of Alabama  
Fayette County Association for the Blind  
Florida Lions Conklin Centers for the Blind  
George Washington Department of Ophthalmology  
Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation Inc.  
Guide Dog Users of New York, Inc.  
Guide Dog Users of Washington State  
Guide Dog Users, Inc.  
Guide Dogs of Hawaii  
Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Healthy Eyes Alliance  
Helen Keller International  
Houston Health Department  
Howard University Department of Ophthalmology  
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness  
Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness  
International Eye Foundation  
International Retinal Research Foundation  
Lackawanna Blind Association  
Lavelle Fund for the Blind  
Lighthouse Guild  
Lions Clubs International  
Macular Degeneration Partnership  
Medical Outreach Ministries
Missouri Council of the Blind
National Keratoconus Foundation
New England College of Optometry
NYU Langone Eye Center, NYU School of Medicine
Ohio Public Health Association
Optometry Giving Sight
Ormond by the Sea Lions Club
PASS Coalition (Pedestrians for Accessible and Safe Streets)
Pediatric Ophthalmology of Montefiore Hospital Medical Center
Pennsylvania Association for the Blind
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind
Perkins School for the Blind
Pine tree GUIDED dog users
Port Orange Lions Club
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Blindness Georgia
Prevent Blindness Iowa
Prevent Blindness North Carolina
Prevent Blindness Northeast Region
Prevent Blindness Northern California
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin
Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate
Prevent Blindness Texas
Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation
SEE International
Seva Foundation
Slattington Elementary School
State University of New York College of Optometry
Steepness Eye Research Institute/Massachusetts Eye & Ear
That Man May See
The Children's Center, Volunteers of America
The Gibney Family Foundation
The Sight Center of Northwest Pennsylvania
United Way of Erie County
University Hospitals
University of Pikeville, Kentucky College of Optometry
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
UPMC Eye Center - Department of Ophthalmology
Venango County Association for the Blind
VIPS (Visually Impaired Persons Support)
Vision Forward Association
Vision Impact Institute
Vision Resources of Central Pennsylvania
VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
VisionServe Alliance
Wyoming Council Of The Blind

Cc: Members, United States Senate