WASHINGTON HEALTH ALLIANCE
Leading health system improvement

June 3, 2019

Chairman Lamar Alexander
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander:

The Washington Health Alliance (the Alliance) appreciates this opportunity to provide the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (Committee) with our views on the bipartisan discussion draft of the Lower Health Care Costs Act released by the Committee on May 23, 2019.

We applaud your goals to achieve better outcomes, better experiences, and lower the cost of healthcare for all Americans. In particular, we appreciate your efforts to promote price transparency, to address the issue of surprise medical billing, and to advocate for pre-treatment cost-sharing and more accurate provider directories, to provide consumers with valuable information to better manage their health care costs.

As you know from our testimony in front of the Committee last September, the Alliance works collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to transform Washington state's health care system for the better. We run a voluntary All-Payer Claims Database that captures claims-line level information on the citizens in our state, with data dating back to 2008, and offer trusted and credible reporting on progress on measures of health care quality and value. But more importantly, we bring together over 185 members organizations across our state representing purchasers, providers, health plans, consumers and other health care partners, to do this work.

We know first-hand that evidence-based change is possible and we have worked alongside employers, insurance carriers, and providers to make that happen. But we also know that transforming data into action and results requires trusted conveners to bring the various stakeholders with divergent priorities together to prioritize strategies, coordinate efforts, and track progress. Accurate data that is transparent to all key stakeholders is the first essential step, but it alone is insufficient to drive improvement and better value in health care.

With this in mind, we would like to specifically comment on Section 303, which establishes a national claims database to promote greater transparency of health care cost and quality. We see the potential of a national database to empower

consumers, health care providers, private and public health care purchasers, health plans, and other stakeholders with better information to drive improvements in quality and affordability. And believe that organizations like the Alliance are uniquely qualified to leverage the power of a national database to achieve these results. Fortunately, as a regional health improvement collaborative (RHIC), the Alliance is not alone in its efforts.

In existence since 2004, the Network for Regional Health Improvement (NRHI) works with more than 30 RHICs and state-affiliated partners (including the Alliance), toward the common goals of better health, better care and lower costs. Together, NRHI and the RHICs have earned the trust of stakeholders and have a demonstrated track record which frequently requires different approaches in different parts of the country. As a trusted, neutral third party, we are able to propel change in a way that is not often accomplished by governmental entities, especially with self-insured organizations.

To that end, we respectfully request that you consider broadening the language in the legislation to include opportunities for regional, multi-stakeholder organizations like the Alliance to:

1) contribute data to the national health care claims database;
2) be authorized users of the national health care claims database; and
3) be eligible to receive grant funding.

We believe that these changes will enable us to use our experience to drive improvements by continuing to leverage the power of data as we have done for years.

Thank you for all you are doing to bring fundamental change to our health care system and lower health care costs in our country. Please let me know how the Alliance can support your ongoing efforts.

Sincerely,

Nancy A. Giunto

Nancy A. Giunto
Executive Director
Washington Health Alliance