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## **ADVOCATES BLAST RESTRICTIONS ON MEDICAID DRUG COVERAGE**

### **Call for modification of recent policy change that limits beneficiaries to five medications, with only two brand-name**

Jackson, MS— Advocates for low-income, disabled and elderly Mississippians will hold a press conference in front of the Governor's Mansion (300 E. Capitol St.) on Tuesday, November 29, at 1pm to outline the harms caused by new limits on prescription drug coverage under Medicaid.

The advocates will call on state and federal officials to revise a harsh new Medicaid policy imposed by the Mississippi legislature as of July 1, 2005. The policy limits Medicaid recipients—who make up one in four Mississippians—to five prescription drugs per month, with only two of the drugs being brand-name.

The policy imperils the health of tens of thousands of low-income Mississippi residents, many of them elderly and/or disabled, who rely on Medicaid. In many cases, the severe new policy threatens the survival of recipients with one or more serious chronic illnesses, including cancer, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, mental illness and/or HIV/AIDS.

The Mississippi restrictions are called "hard caps" because patients are not allowed to obtain a greater number of medications even if doctors confirm that they need them.

Medicaid recipient Glenda Fay Dennis, 52, of Eupora, Mississippi, has been hit hard by the new policy. She requires 13 medications to treat her illnesses. Since the five-drug limit began, "I've been playing a dangerous game of filling five prescriptions each month," she said, "and praying that my one-month prescriptions somehow will last two months or more."

Mary Troupe, executive director of Mississippi's Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, said, "this policy is going to force many Medicaid recipients into hospitals and nursing homes, the only places they can get all the drugs they need. That will cost the state far more than if these patients had had adequate treatment in the first place."

"It's not right for our state to impose low, inflexible caps on prescription drugs," said attorney Martha Bergmark, president of the Mississippi Center for Justice, one of the organizations calling for changes in the policy. "This policy means that thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of our neighbors, grandparents and friends throughout Mississippi lack the medications they desperately need."

In addition to the Mississippi Center for Justice, advocates calling for change include AARP Foundation, the National Health Law Program, the National Senior Citizens Law Center and Housing Works, an HIV/AIDS agency with offices in Mississippi, New York, and Washington, DC.