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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce

“Ryan White CARE Act Amendments of 2009” Discussion Draft Legislation September 9, 2009

Since its inception in 1990, the Ryan White Program has played a critical role in addressing this country’s AIDS/HIV epidemic. Today, some half a million Americans rely on the Program for basic care, treatment, and support services. It’s hard to imagine how patients, their families, and our States would be able to deal with epidemic without this program in place.

Which is why it is so important that we act as quickly as possible to reauthorize the Program. With today’s hearing, we begin that process which I hope will culminate in a piece of legislation that Members from both sides of the aisle can strongly support.

I believe the discussion draft we are reviewing today makes for an excellent start towards that end. It contains no major changes to the program; indeed, most of its sections either extend existing policies or clarify parts of current law that have caused confusion. Others make changes to mitigate destabilizing funding decreases that have resulted from the application of the 2006 reauthorization.

We’ll hear more about these specific provisions from our witnesses today. I think an overarching theme that will emerge is that with some relatively plain fine tuning, the Ryan White Program can continue to do its good work – providing services to those most in need – for another three years.

This is especially important because of the Program’s looming sunset deadline of September 30th. A quick reauthorization will give grantees the stability they need to plan, retain staff, and maintain life-saving services for their clients. The painful budget cuts that we’re seeing in so many of our states make it all the more important to provide this stability.

That said, I want to underscore the word “draft” that is in the title of the document that is the subject of today’s hearing. This draft was informed by technical assistance from the Administration, as well as a community consensus paper that has been endorsed by nearly 300 organizations in 47 states.

But this is just the starting point. We have already begun talking through various issues raised in the draft in a bipartisan fashion. Soon we will begin negotiations with our colleagues in the Senate with the commitment to doing our best to reach an agreement before the end of this month.

That will take much hard work, but I believe we can get there. We simply have to – the people who depend on the Ryan White Program for the services they need can't wait. I look forward to working with all of our colleagues on this Committee in ensuring that we reach this goal and that an even stronger Ryan White Program will be in our communities for another three years.