May 8, 2009

Honorable Jared Polis
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RE: Support for H.R. 2209– Restoring the Partnership for County Health Care Costs Act

Dear Congressman Polis:

On behalf of Colorado Counties Inc., I am writing to express our strong support for H.R. 2209, the Restoring the Partnership for County Health Care Costs Act of 2009. H.R. 2209 would allow federally-supported benefits, such as Medicaid or Medicare, to be paid for individuals that are being held in jail pending trial. H.R. 2209 would restore the federal-state-county partnership for coverage of health care services for persons who have not been found guilty or sentenced to jail, but who are nevertheless being held in local jails.

As you know, counties are responsible for providing health care to individuals being held in our jails. Most of these individuals are released into our communities and seek to resume their health care coverage and other benefits. Because of federal law that prohibits their coverage while in jail, they often have difficulty in re-accessing these benefits, thus disrupting the continuity of their care.

Over the past 2½ years, Denver's seven metro counties have studied the fiscal impact of mentally ill jail inmates on county government. While mentally ill inmates make up only one segment of the inmate population requiring medical services, this population is illustrative of how expensive it is to treat and care for jail inmates. To put the impact in real terms, the metro counties have identified that 20% of their jail population has an Axis I diagnosis (serious mental illness). These Axis I inmates and their corresponding health care needs have had an average fiscal impact of $36.4 million a year in the seven metro counties.

Passage of H.R. 2209 would acknowledge that counties have assumed a disproportionate burden in the provision of health care to persons who have not been convicted of a crime and who are otherwise eligible for federal benefits. We urge your support of the bill.

Sincerely,

Larry Kallenberger
CCI Executive Director