The recently released 1115 Medicaid waiver in North Carolina is unacceptable as currently written. There are two vital components that must be revisited in order to meet the needs of North Carolinians- closing the coverage gap for 500,000 North Carolinians through Medicaid expansion and ensuring freedom of provider choice for family planning Medicaid patients.

Currently, there are hundreds of thousands of individuals living in North Carolina who fall into the state's insurance gap. This gap is largely made up of individuals who are working low wage jobs that do not have the ability to purchase private health insurance and do not meet the state standards to obtain Medicaid since state leaders refused to expand the program under the Affordable Care Act. Included in this gap are parents with young children who are faced with the choice of obtaining health insurance coverage or forgoing it to afford other basic necessities.

There are also real benefits for North Carolina citizens that would be obtained by expanding Medicaid in the state. In North Carolina, there are about a half million people in the state that need and deserve access to affordable health care and without this access more than 1,000 of these people will die each year.

In addition to Medicaid expansion, it is vital that freedom of Provider Choice for family planning patients be included in the 1115 waiver. Medicaid recipients deserve to be able to visit the provider they know and trust. All people in North Carolina deserve to be able to chose their healthcare provider regardless of the services that they offer. CMS itself has made this clear yet the North Carolina 1115 waiver eliminates this important provider choice. Not only would this put our state at risk of losing our federal Medicaid match, it would mean that many Medicaid recipients lose access to their trusted health care provider.

Individuals chose a health care provider for many reasons. For some, it is a question of the judgement free and quality care they receive. Excluding providers like Planned Parenthood from Medicaid programs would have real life implications like barring individuals from access their trusted provider of essential health care including lifesaving cancer screenings, well-woman exams, birth control and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted disease.

The people of North Carolina deserve better and should be provided with the affordable health care that is essential for quality lives.

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