

April 28, 2003

The Honorable Charles B. Rangel  
2354 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Rangel:

Families USA, the national consumer health advocacy organization, strongly endorses HR 1199, the Medicare Rx Drug Benefit & Discount Act of 2003. This bill, sponsored by you and many of your colleagues, would at long last provide a comprehensive, dependable, and affordable prescription drug benefit in the Medicare program.

We particularly appreciate the bill's extensive protection for those beneficiaries under 175% of the Federal Poverty Level. Your proposal would truly ensure that being a lower-income person does not mean that you are unable to afford the life-saving pharmaceuticals available to the upper-income in our society. There are other bills that say they help the low-income, but by applying an asset test actually deny help to approximately 40% of the low-income, or nearly 7 million people; we are thankful that your bill does not apply such an asset test. We also appreciate the fact that your bill's benefits will be available to ALL Medicare beneficiaries, and they are not in any way conditioned on joining a particular type of health care plan. We believe that your bill is the single most comprehensive prescription drug proposal in the Congress and provides the most health security to our nation's 41 million disabled and retired who depend on Medicare for their health and safety. To date, your proposal is the standard by which other plans should be judged.

We deeply regret that the President's budget request for fiscal year 2004 and this year's Congressional budget resolution fail to provide enough money to fund fully the level of prescription drug benefit that you propose—the level of benefit which is available to Members of Congress and the President. We regret that once again tax cuts, largely for those with higher incomes, have come before meeting the real needs of the American people and the adequate funding of the Medicare program. In light of your long commitment to the low-income and to Medicare, we know that you will continue to fight for adequate resources in future years to fully fund HR 1199, and we look forward to working with you to enact as many good features of your plan as possible.

Sincerely,



Ronald F. Pollack  
Executive Director