

**Statement from Arrah Facsko to the
Michigan House Insurance Committee
February 21, 2013**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Arrah Facsko and I reside in Traverse City, Michigan. Thank you for the opportunity to address you through this letter. I had fully intended to travel to Lansing to attend your Committee hearing but my health situation will not allow me to do so.

I am writing to you regarding Senate Bills 61 and 62. While there are many implications to changing Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan from a state-chartered charitable nonprofit to a nonprofit mutual insurance company, I am most concerned about the impact these bills will have on my access to and ability to afford my current Blue Cross policy, Legacy Medigap C plan.

Just five short years ago, I was a hard working young woman with boundless dreams, excited about having been approved for my first mortgage loan. Then I developed an illness and found that it wouldn't go away. I am now 39, in my fifth long year of struggling with a rare and debilitating disease that, until recently, no one knew what to call it. After four years of countless doctor appointments with numerous medical specialists in Traverse City, at the University of Michigan, and the National Institutes of Health, I was finally diagnosed with *Churg-Strauss Syndrome* at the Mayo Clinic in January 2012. The disease is incurable and unpredictable.

At this point, I suffer from chronic lung and sinus disease, coupled with the challenges presented by the severe side effects of the only known treatment, which is a steroid therapy. While the doctors at the Mayo Clinic have given me answers, hope and a plan to manage my disease, I require frequent check-ups that include multiple tests, endoscopies, biopsies, and even surgeries. I have traveled to the Mayo Clinic four times this year, and I have to return at least every six months, probably for the rest of my life. The trip itself is very expensive, let alone the medical costs of seeing up to six or seven specialists in one visit. When I am home in Traverse City, I require frequent visits to my local team of doctors to manage my disease.

Because of my illness, I was awarded Social Security Disability and Medicare benefits in July of 2012. I now live on a fixed income of \$900 per month from Social Security. When I became eligible for Medicare, I found out about the services available through the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program (MMAP). I contacted the local MMAP office in Traverse City office and discussed my circumstances with a counselor. The MMAP representative explained the various plan options available to me. It quickly became evident to me that due to my huge medical expenses, I needed to purchase a Medicare medigap, otherwise known as a supplement insurance plan. I found that there are very few insurance companies that offer medigap policies to people who are disabled and under the age of 65. In fact, those companies that do offer them can either deny people with disabilities medigap coverage or establish a premium that is simply unaffordable. The choice became obvious to me. I decided to apply for the BCBSM Legacy C Medigap. This plan has afforded me excellent coverage during

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the few months since I have enrolled in it. While my disease is still a major focus in my life, I at least have the peace of mind knowing that I will not be denied health coverage and nor will I have to face medical expenses that would bury me in massive and irreversible debt.

Some have suggested that Medicare Advantage plans are a good alternative to medigap plans. That is absolutely not true. While Medicare Advantage plans are great for some people, this type of coverage would result in a huge expense for those beneficiaries with extreme health problems because the deductibles and co-pays associated with these types of plans.

Also, please keep in mind that I am only one of many disabled citizens in the State of Michigan who would face similar circumstances if you allow these Legacy Medigap plans to change from their current form. Nothing compares to the Blue Cross Legacy plan, and to lose it would financially devastate me and many others.

Although my goals have shifted from buying my first house to focusing on attaining remission from a very challenging disease, the dream of owning a home one day is still alive. If I am unable to afford my Blue Cross Legacy Medigap insurance policy, or if it is eliminated all together, that glimmer of hope will most certainly be extinguished.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I urge you to amend the Senate bills before you to require that Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan continue with their low cost Legacy Medigap policies.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Arrah Facsko
Traverse City, MI 49684