

Dear Dr. Cotney :

Thank you for contacting me regarding S.1955, the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act. I appreciate your comments and the opportunity to respond.

As a former small business owner, I understand that the ability to provide affordable health insurance is one of the most critical issues facing small businesses in Georgia and across this country today. More than 45 million Americans lack health insurance, and 62 percent of those uninsured are either employed by a small business or dependent on someone who is. We must help level the playing field for small businesses so that they can provide health insurance to their workers who desperately need it.

While some have raised concerns about state oversight of association health plans, I can assure you that patients will have access to the care they need when they need it the most. Over the last 40 years, state mandated benefits have increased from seven to 1,800, increasing costs to the provider and consumer and putting affordable health insurance out of the reach of small businesses. Through this legislation, we can reduce health care costs and improve access to affordable health insurance coverage for all employers by streamlining state insurance laws and regulations.

Under S.1955, if an insurer chooses to offer coverage that does not comply with the mandates of that state, it must also offer a comprehensive alternative containing the same benefits, services and provider categories of a state employee plan in one of the five most populous states - California , New York , Texas , Florida and Illinois . In this way, S.1955 provides consumers with the benefits and services mandated in their state or with comparable coverage under another state's plan.

Additionally, association health plans would still have to be licensed in each state in which they operate, preserving the traditional role of the states in protecting the interests of insurance consumers. S. 1955 also provides for the creation of a harmonization board under the Department of Health and Human Services to develop uniform standards for certain areas of health insurance regulation, specifically form and rate filing, market conduct review, prompt payment of claims and internal review. These regulations would still be enforced by the states.

S.1955 was recently passed by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, a committee on which I serve, and has been cleared for consideration by the full Senate. I believe that the committee's action is a good step forward and I urge the full Senate to act soon. Providing affordable health insurance to small businesses - the bedrock of our economy - is critical for our nation, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in achieving this important objective.

Thank you again for contacting me. Please visit my webpage at <http://isakson.senate.gov> for more information on the issues important to you and to sign up for my e-newsletter.

Sincerely,
Johnny Isakson
United States Senator