



# TENNESSEE HEALTH CARE CAMPAIGN



*Working for affordable access to high-quality health care for all Tennesseans*

**For Immediate Release:**

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## **Medicare beneficiaries would lose their choice of doctor under the Health Care Compact bill being considered by State Legislature**

**Nashville, TN** – Under a bill proposed in the Tennessee state legislature (HB0369, SB0326), and to be voted on by the House Health and Human Resources sub-committee on Tuesday, the federally protected and administered Medicare program would move under the control of the Bureau of TennCare. “This could jeopardize security, choice and benefits for over 1 million seniors and people with disabilities in Tennessee who rely on the Medicare program for their health care coverage”, says Beth Uselton, Executive Director for the Tennessee Health Care Campaign.

The Health Care Compact bill, HB0369 sponsored by Representative Mark White and SB0326 carried by Senator Mae Beavers, is the most recent political attempt to exempt Tennessee from the new federal health care law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. “Unfortunately Tennessee seniors are being played like pawns in this reckless attempt to thumb our noses at the federal government. I have seen nothing in the Compact bill which leads me to believe that the state has a plan for how to administer Medicare in the best interest of the people who depend on it” says Tony Garr, Policy Director for the Tennessee Health Care Campaign.

"Since 1965, Medicare beneficiaries have received guaranteed benefits, protections, and have never once had to worry about their Medicare. In fact, over the years, their Medicare has been improved. Now, under the Compact bill, the one (1) million Medicare beneficiaries in this state will have a lot to worry about if TennCare takes over their Medicare," according to Garr. In 2005, 170,000 TennCare enrollees thought that they had guaranteed coverage and were cut off TennCare by Governor Bredesen. The state legislature did not stop these cuts. A year later, almost 100,000 Tennesseans who had SSI, Supplemental Security Income benefits under TennCare, thought that they had the protections of the federal court, but Governor Bredesen cut them off as well. The state legislature did nothing. "Tennessee seniors have good reason to worry about a state takeover of Medicare," says Garr.

“Medicare beneficiaries could lose their choice of doctors under the Health Care Compact bill being considered by the State Legislature,” according to Tony Garr. Under this legislation, TennCare, which relies on Managed Care Organizations to administer benefits, would decide which doctors beneficiaries could see. Most doctors in Tennessee do not accept TennCare because its payment rates are lower than Medicare. This is especially true for many specialists such as heart and orthopedic specialists. Medicare beneficiaries living in rural Tennessee would even have fewer choices of doctors, leaving many without access to care and without protections for coverage. “This bill is scary because it carries with it impacts and consequences for all Tennesseans who rely on federal laws to protect their health care. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Under the Compact bill, Tennessee citizens could lose many rights and protections they don’t even realize are in danger.”

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