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**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Consumer Assistance in Wisconsin: Closed for Business**

*Commissioner of Insurance Terminates Consumer Assistance Grant for Wisconsin*

**Madison, WI** – Wisconsin’s Office of the Commissioner of Insurance clumsily, brazenly killed a new consumer assistance program for Wisconsin families enrolling in health care coverage programs. The Commissioner’s rationale is that consumer assistance is “a waste of taxpayer money” according to Deputy Commissioner Dan Schwartz, a former insurance industry insider and lobbyist. Bobby Peterson, Public Interest Lawyer at ABC for Health, said “pulling the plug on Wisconsin consumers is a politically craven act that impacts consumers across the four corners of the state. The lack of consumer assistance is a nice payback for insurance industry pals, but the punitive impact for consumers means virtually no assistance for over half our insured population in self funded ERISA health plans and much more limited assistance for individuals recently laid off from work, families facing bureaucratic hurdles with the BadgerCare programs or other health coverage programs, and for families facing an illness simply trying to understand and coordinate public and private coverage eligibility concerns.”

The Consumer Assistance Program began as the US Department of Health and Human Services established independent offices of health insurance consumer assistance and ombudsman programs in 39 states and the District of Columbia. Wisconsin’s former Insurance Commissioner Sean Dilweg secured over \$600,000 of federal money to establish the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI) based program. OCI proposed to add additional staff with the funds and also selected ABC for Health to provide certain consumer assistance related to consumer enrollment, benefits troubleshooting and health care service provider education about health coverage benefits and programs. Since beginning the contract in December of 2010, ABC for Health assisted over 60 Wisconsin families navigate complicated public and private benefits and eligibility issues. In addition, staff developed new educational materials to help inform service providers about patient’s rights and responsibilities related to health care coverage programs. Peterson noted, “Foolishly, the new Commissioner, Ted Nickel, will give scarce consumer assistance money back to the federal government and cost our state more jobs.”

“Commissioner Nickel’s action viciously cuts against the side of progress and consumer protection in Wisconsin,” added Peterson. Wisconsin developed a statewide Senior Benefits Specialist program many years ago and that has a proven track record of helping seniors over age 60 cut the red tape of public and private benefit programs. Now, a nascent program for families and people under age 60 is halted in its tracks. “The new administration at OCI hands out gifts to the insurance industry while stabbing consumers in the back, making those with a sick child or family member face large public and private bureaucracies alone,” Peterson continues. “We will do our best to continue the fight for



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Wisconsin families, and work to ensure that people get health coverage regardless of Wisconsin's political climate and a regressive agenda at OCI.”

ABC for Health produced a webcast response and reaction and has made the link available to the public and media:

<http://96.60.62.171/mediasiteabc/Viewer/?peid=559f8a9d4efb4552b395e7fab6d55f84>

ABC for Health is a Wisconsin-based, nonprofit, public interest law firm dedicated to linking children and families, particularly those with special health care needs, to health care benefits and services. ABC for Health's mission is to provide information, advocacy tools, legal services and expert support needed to obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage and services.

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