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**La Shawn K. Ford**  
**State Representative**  
**8<sup>th</sup> District**

To: Colleagues of the General Assembly

February 3, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

In follow up to my December 28, 2020 letter to you about ensuring greater access to pharmacy services for Illinois Medicaid recipients, I would ask for your sponsorship and support for [House Bill 0591](#).

As background, as of December 1, 2020, Aetna Better Health Illinois Medicaid recipients must use CVS pharmacies or a limited number of smaller independent pharmacies. Using Walgreens is no longer an option for these recipients. Much of the West and South Sides of Chicago is a pharmacy desert, and CVS has closed many of their stores in these communities. There are no CVS pharmacies in the West Side communities of Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, or Austin. Independent research shows that only 26 of the 44 pharmacies that Aetna claimed to serve their clients were actually available. 55% of the census tracts in these zip codes have low-accessibility to in-network pharmacies (>0.5 miles in low-income neighborhoods), as opposed to the 100% access claimed by Aetna.

Limiting pharmacy options for Medicaid recipients affects not only people on the West and South Sides of Chicago, but people throughout Illinois. During a pandemic when people need their medications and even the coronavirus vaccine when it is distributed through pharmacies, and when people are dying daily due to opioid overdoses, it makes no sense to limit access to pharmacies. Many Medicaid recipients do not have their own cars and must use public transportation, expensive ride sharing, or even must walk miles to get their medications. According to HFS, the West and South Sides of Chicago have some of the highest numbers of socially vulnerable persons in Illinois. We must live up to our claims that equity is the foundation of everything that we do as a state by righting this wrong as soon as possible.

CVS Pharmacy bought the Aetna insurance company in 2018. Aetna bought IlliniCare in 2020, assuming its Illinois Medicaid patients. On December 1, 2020, Aetna restricted its Illinois Medicaid patients to only using its own CVS pharmacies and a small number of independent pharmacies, generally excluding Walgreens pharmacies.

I've talked to representatives from CVS, Aetna, and HFS to correct this injustice and this direct attack on the poor. I've worked with providers and advocates on a legislative fix to end this bad business practice, leading to the introduction of House Bill 0591. I look forward to working with you and all stakeholders to create better access to pharmacy services for our Illinois Medicaid recipients throughout the state, thereby improving their health as we continue to address structural social and racial inequities. We need to work for the best interests of our Illinois Medicaid recipients - they need us to stand up for them. We must work together to right this wrong.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "La Shawn K. Ford".

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative – Eighth District