Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 30th, 2026

Nick Barto
Chief Executive Officer
BJC HealthCare
4901 Forest Park Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63108

Steve Nelson
Chief Executive Officer
Aetna, Inc.
151 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06156

Dear Mr. Barto and Mr. Nelson,

We write to express our concern regarding the status of the contract dispute between BJC HealthCare and Aetna, which threatens to disrupt access to care for thousands of Medicare Advantage patients across Illinois and Missouri, including Illinois retirees enrolled in the state's Total Retiree Advantage Illinois (TRAIL) program. It is our understanding that, absent a new agreement, BJC HealthCare will leave Aetna's Medicare Advantage network effective January 1, 2027.

As one of the region's largest health care providers, BJC plays a critical role in guaranteeing access to high-quality, affordable health care for tens of thousands of Medicare Advantage enrollees in the greater St. Louis and Metro East region. Losing access to these services could force seniors in both Illinois and Missouri to travel farther for care, face higher out-of-network rates, or lose access to trusted providers they have relied on for years.

Furthermore, we would like to call attention to the outsized impact this dispute could have on Illinois state retirees who obtain Aetna Medicare Advantage coverage through the TRAIL program. For state retirees, Aetna's network is often the only available plan under the TRAIL program, which leaves affected retirees with very limited options to maintain access to their longtime BJC providers. This leaves thousands of retirees facing difficult decisions about their health care, especially those who depend on BJC for ongoing, medically necessary treatment, who will now need to obtain special authorization from their health insurance to temporarily continue treatment with BJC.

Given the history of negotiations between Aetna and BJC, including last year's agreement to maintain in-network access through 2026, it is imperative that both parties come together to negotiate in good faith a deal that protects access to the necessary health care for seniors in the bi-state region. Patients should not bear the consequences of an unresolved contractual dispute.

We therefore urge Aetna and BJC HealthCare to return to the negotiating table and work collaboratively to reach a fair contract negotiation that maintains in-network coverage at BJC HealthCare's facilities. In any resolution, we urge both parties to prioritize a deal that puts patients first, guarantees the long-term certainty they deserve, and keeps costs low for patients. Should an agreement not be reached, we ask both organizations to ensure that appropriate continuity-of-care protections are in place for affected patients. We respectfully request that our offices be updated in any future negotiations, and we stand by to provide any future assistance.

Sincerely,

Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress

Wesley Bell
Member of Congress