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To: Senate Health and Welfare Committee

Re: Support for H.654

From: The Office of the Health Care Advocate

Date: February 16st, 2022

The Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) would like to express general support for H.654 as passed by the House. We believe it strikes the right balance of extending COVID-related flexibilities for a reasonable time while maintaining important regulatory and consumer protections.

The HCA supports the language contained in Sec. 9 related to PRESCRIPTION DRUGS; MAINTENANCE MEDICATIONS; EARLY REFILLS. Early in the COVID pandemic, we received calls from Vermonters who were having problems accessing their maintenance medications. We have not received as many cases related to this issue recently, but this could be because of the existence of this very provision – which allows people to refill maintenance prescriptions early to maintain a 30-day supply. It is also important to recognize that this section applies only to a prescription drug taken on a regular basis over an extended period to treat a chronic or long-term condition. We believe that the risk of misuse or abuse of this provision to be very low.

We continue to believe that the flexibility that this provision provides for Vermonters is important. Many Vermonters continue to take important steps to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19 by reducing the number of times that they are in public spaces. While there may be a relatively small number of Vermonters utilizing this provision, we have heard that they are often seniors who appreciate the predictability and flexibility that this provision provides. We continue to believe that it is an important flexibility to maintain for Vermonters.

Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership in this important area.

Sincerely,

s\ Mike Fisher, Chief Health Care Advocate