

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 9, 2019

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, District of Columbia 20201

Dear Administrator Verma:

We write to request that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services extend the deadline for 2020 Open Enrollment in the Federal Health Care Marketplaces to 5:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on December 16, which would allow residents of all states to enroll through the end of December 15, the publicly advertised deadline. We also request that you use the 5:00 am deadline for future Open Enrollment periods.

As it currently stands, Open Enrollment is scheduled to close at 3:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on December 16, which is 10:00 p.m. Hawaii Standard Time and 11:00 p.m. Alaska Time on December 15. However, the timing of the deadline is not prominently advertised on HealthCare.gov leaving residents in Alaska and Hawaii to falsely assume they can enroll in health coverage through the end of the day on December 15, resulting in a misleading deadline for the residents of these two states. It is easy to imagine a consumer in Alaska or Hawaii going online at 11:00 p.m. on December 15 to enroll in coverage, only to be shut out despite being within the advertised deadline.

Data from past open enrollment periods indicate that many people put off enrolling in health coverage until the last minute. Last year, about half of sign-ups occurred in the last week and the final day of Open Enrollment is the busiest, particularly the final hours. Given how many mainland consumers sign up in the final hours of Open Enrollment, it is clear that consumers assume that midnight is the deadline. It is unacceptable to take away this valuable window of time away from people simply because they live in a different state.

It is absolutely vital that the residents of Hawaii and Alaska be given an equal opportunity to that of the rest of the country to enroll through midnight local time on December 15. It is our understanding that keeping the Marketplace open for an additional two hours does not require significant infrastructure changes or staffing changes, and is a policy that should have been implemented years ago.

Given the short amount of time left in this year's Open Enrollment period, we request a response by December 11, 2019. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kerry Allen on Senator Hirono's staff at 202-224-9726 or kerry_allen@hirono.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator