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## **NBA All-Star and Kidney Disease Patient Advocate Alonzo Mourning Travels to Washington, DC to Urge 'Equal Treatment' of Individuals with Kidney Failure Under Health Care Reform Law**

**WASHINGTON** – In recognition of World Kidney Day today, former Georgetown University stand-out, NBA all-star and leading kidney patient advocate Alonzo Mourning met with key lawmakers and White House staff to raise awareness about kidney disease and urge them to ensure individuals diagnosed with kidney failure – also known as end stage renal disease (ESRD) – receive equal treatment under the health care reform law.

Under current law, individuals who have been diagnosed with kidney failure who have group health plan coverage are allowed to maintain their private coverage for 30 months before being enrolled in Medicare. However, under the new health care reform law's health benefit exchange program, it is unclear whether individuals who enroll in health exchanges and are diagnosed with kidney failure will be granted the same right, if they so choose, to maintain private coverage for an extended period of time as people with group health coverage purchased outside of the exchanges.

"As someone who suffered from kidney disease but was fortunate enough to have had a kidney transplant, I am proud to speak out for our nation's kidney patients and ask lawmakers to see to it that the health reform law fully protects individuals with kidney failure as it seeks to protect all other Americans," said Mourning. "We urge our friends on Capitol Hill and the White House officials to grant individuals with kidney failure the same right to maintain private coverage as people with group health coverage purchased outside of the exchanges before the Medicare benefit kicks in. This is simply an issue of fairness and parity for patients, and it is truly what the intentions were when health care reform legislation passed."

This policy – known as Medicare Secondary Payer (MSP) – allows patients to learn more about their condition, take advantage of their existing plan's offerings, have lower co-pays, and keep the same plan as their families for 30 months, until Medicare coverage begins. The ability for patients to choose to stay on their own insurance is very important to people dealing with kidney failure since an initial diagnosis of kidney failure can be frightening and overwhelming, and having the choice of staying on their private plans longer can also help patients as they get up to speed on their condition and learn more about Medicare.

Mourning was joined in his meetings today by kidney disease patients, patient advocates and representatives from Kidney Care Partners (KCP), a coalition of patient advocates, dialysis

professionals, care providers and manufacturers working together to improve quality of care for individuals with Chronic Kidney Disease and ESRD.

As Mourning and the patient advocates noted, kidney failure patients are unique in that their condition has no cure, meaning patients must have a transplant or receive dialysis – usually three times a week for several hours at a time – for the rest of their lives to survive. Patients are often very sick due to related conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, and due to their state of health and regular dialysis requirements often cannot hold regular jobs to help cover the costs of treatment. For these reasons, in 1973, Medicare began offering coverage to all kidney failure patients.

“I deeply appreciate the protections that we, as kidney patients, have, and I thought it was important to come to Washington to ask our lawmakers to keep us in mind as they put the new exchanges into practice,” said Eric Edwards, a kidney failure patient from Fairburn, Georgia, and member of the national, non-profit Dialysis Patient Citizens (DPC) who accompanied Mr. Mourning. “The passage of the health reform law is a huge step forward; now we just need to make sure it is executed in a way that protects those who need it most.”

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#### About Kidney Care Partners

*Kidney Care Partners is an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, providers and manufacturers working together to improve the quality of care for individuals with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD).*

To learn more about Kidney Care Partners, visit <http://www.kidneycarepartners.org>.