

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representatives Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) voted with a bipartisan majority in the U.S. House of Representatives today to send the President landmark legislation prohibiting health insurance companies and employers from discriminating against people on the basis of genetic tests.

“Scientists have made great strides to fight diseases and help Americans live longer and healthier lives, but with this new knowledge also comes the responsibility to protect individuals from inequality,” **Arcuri said**. “This important legislation will prohibit health insurance companies and employers from misusing new information about the fundamental building blocks of who we are.”

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (H.R. 493) prohibits group health plans and health insurers from canceling, denying, refusing to renew, or changing the terms or premiums of coverage based solely on an individual’s genetic predisposition to developing a disease in the future. It also bars employers from using individuals’ genetic information when making hiring, firing, promotion and other employment-related decisions.

The legislation generally prohibits health insurers and employers from requiring genetic tests. However, by prohibiting the improper use of genetic information, this bill encourages Americans to undergo testing necessary for early treatment and prevention of genetic-based diseases. The genetic testing can improve individuals’ lives by providing information on how to avoid future health problems and cope more effectively with conditions and associated costs.

Current federal and state laws provide only a patchwork of protections to prevent employers and insurers from denying health coverage or job opportunities on the basis of genetic information. H.R. 493 will clarify how genetic information must be protected in both insurance and employment settings.

H.R. 493 is supported by more than 500 organizations, including the Coalition for Genetic Fairness, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American Public Health Association, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, and the Personalized Medicine Coalition.

Just a week after taking office, Arcuri cosponsored the bipartisan Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007 (H.R. 3), which passed the House of Representatives but was repeatedly vetoed by the President.

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