

Ruling Puts Pharmacy Care for Minorities At Risk

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) today announced its objection to the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) decision to allow a merger between pharmacy benefit management (PBM) companies Medco Health Solutions and Express Scripts, Inc (ESI), saying the merger puts African Americans and other minorities at risk of losing important pharmacy services. NBCC said the decision should be reversed by federal courts.

"Charged with the mission of protecting consumers, the FTC has instead, inexplicably, approved a merger that will hurt consumers by pushing community pharmacies out of business and reducing access to pharmacy care for American minorities," said Harry Alford, president and CEO of NBCC. "We are now counting on state attorneys general to step in and make sure patients and consumers are protected by filing suit against the merger."

Alford noted that the merger would have an adverse impact on African American individuals, communities and businesses. By deciding to allow the merger without even putting conditions in place to make sure Americans are protected, the FTC has paved the way for the new mega-PBM company to have unprecedented market control and the power to increase prices and push out rivals, including community pharmacies.

In many underserved communities, the local pharmacist is the closest and most affordable health care provider. The services they provide are critical – especially in minority communities that have been hardest hit by our economic downturn and are more likely to be afflicted with life-threatening illnesses, and less likely to be immunized against common, easily preventable illnesses.

"In light of existing health disparities and economic difficulties, the merger is ill-advised. Two giant PBM corporations will profit at the expense of locally-owned community businesses and minority patients will have a harder time obtaining the prescription medications and other health services they need," Alford continued. "This outcome is simply unacceptable and needs to be prevented."

The NBCC has already written to the attorneys general of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas and California supporting their effort to block the merger. It has been reported the five attorneys general are considering legal action against the merger to protect consumers.

About the NBCC: *The National Black Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity within the United States and via interaction with the Black Diaspora.*

Contact:

Harry C. Alford (202-466-6888)