

June 1, 2011

The Honorable Ronald Wyden
223 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization



The Honorable Patrick Roberts
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Wyden and Roberts,

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and its more than 45,000 individual members, I am writing to thank you for your leadership and the recent introduction of S. 722, the Hospice Evaluation and Legitimate Payment (HELP) Act. NHPCO and its advocacy affiliate the Hospice Action Network enthusiastically support the HELP Act. At a time when the hospice community is facing severe reimbursement cuts and a myriad of regulatory challenges, S. 722 addresses practical ways to ensure that hospices continue to deliver high quality end-of-life care in a way that reflects the operational realities of programs.

As you well know, the hospice community has been a pioneer within the Medicare program – providing compassionate care to dying Americans for more than 30 years, with an average profit margin of less than three percent. Unfortunately, access to the high-quality, cost effective care provided by hospice is in jeopardy. Numerous challenges are being thrust upon the hospice community, seemingly, all at the same time. We are facing the devastating impact of two recent rate cuts to Medicare hospice reimbursement, the first regulatory and the second statutory, as well as adapting to significant regulatory changes, and looking at an even more uncertain future as hospice payment reform authority is transferred from Congress to the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

To mitigate these current and future threats to the hospice community, the bipartisan HELP Act would (1) require the Secretary to establish a payment reform demonstration program to test and evaluate any prospective payment revisions to hospice, (2) increase hospice survey frequency to every three years, and (3) amend the new face-to-face encounter requirement to reflect operational realities for hospice programs, and the needs of the patients and families they serve.

These reasonable and measured changes will not only grant the hospice community some measure of relief from financial pressures, but also ensure that any payment recommendations coming out of the significant transfer of power from Congress to the Secretary is well-tested across the full spectrum of the hospice community so that programs are not disproportionately and negatively impacted beyond their ability to serve the patients and families who depend on them.

Congress has laid important groundwork for the effort to ensure that hospice payment reform and other recent regulatory changes were undertaken in a cautious and deliberate manner, and we believe this legislative intervention is a critical and logical next step to making sure that hospice programs in Oregon, Kansas and the rest of the nation can weather these changes.

NHPCO commends your leadership on the advancement of end-of-life care. We strongly support passage of this important legislation, and look forward to working with you on this and future legislation that meets the need for all Americans to have access to quality end-of-life care.

Sincerely,

J. Donald Schumacher
CEO/President, National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization