

June 6th, 2011

**National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization**



The Honorable Charles Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kent Conrad
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Conrad,

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. 891, The Medicare Hospice Access Act. NHPCO and its advocacy affiliate, the Hospice Action Network, enthusiastically support S. 891. At a time when hospice programs are threatened by rising transportation costs, as well as a lack of physicians and nurse practitioners, S. 891 takes a practical step toward ensuring that compassionate, high-quality, cost effective end-of-life care will be available for future generations.

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. These razor-thin margins are even slimmer, or even negative, in rural areas where a single program may serve thousands of square miles.

Unfortunately, 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. Hospices in rural areas are experiencing especially distressing circumstances: many simply cannot afford to hire qualified physicians to provide the specialized care that hospice requires.

To mitigate these current and future threats to the hospice community, the Medicare Hospice Access Act would allow Physician Assistants (PAs) to provide hospice care to those patients who elect Medicare's hospice benefit. By allowing certified PAs to provide hospice care, hospice programs will be able to keep up with the growing population of Americans electing hospice at the end of life, regardless of location.

NHPCO commends your leadership on the advancement of end-of-life care. We strongly support the 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Donald Schumacher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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