

National Hospice and Palliative Care  
Organization



April 3, 2017

The Honorable Lynn Jenkins  
United States House of Representatives  
1526 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind  
United States House of Representatives  
1502 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Jenkins and Congressman Kind,

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), our more than 1,200 members, and the more than 1.5 million patients our members care for each year, we are proud to support the *Rural Access to Hospice Act of 2017*. This legislation would remove a barrier in current law that restricts patients' access to the hospice attending physician of their choice in rural and under-served communities.

Rural Health Centers (RHC) were created in 1977 as a response to a shortage of physicians serving Medicare patients in rural America. RHCs provide primary care in more than 4,000 communities across the country. Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) were established to promote primary care service delivery in underserved urban and rural communities. For some patients, RHCs and FQHCs are their only source for primary care. Over 21 million Americans were served at 9,000 FQHC sites in 2013.

When a beneficiary elects the Medicare hospice benefit, they are able to keep their primary care provider, who becomes the hospice attending physician. The attending physician helps develop the hospice care plan, sees the patient for office visits, helps manage the patient's unrelated and chronic conditions, and provides other critical health care functions throughout the patient's life. Typically, clinicians bill Medicare Part B for their hospice attending physician services.

Unfortunately, current law prevents clinicians at FQHCs and RHCs from billing for hospice attending physician services. If a patient who receives their primary care at an FQHC or RHC elects hospice, he or she has to "give up" their FQHC or RHC primary care provider. This creates either a disruption in care for the patient or a barrier for hospice care for individuals in underserved and frontier communities.

*The Rural Access to Hospice Act* would address this issue by allowing primary care providers at FQHCs and RHCs to bill for hospice attending physician services. This common sense, bipartisan legislation will go a long way to ensuring that all patients can have the care team of their choice at the end of life. NHPCO strongly supports this important legislation and looks forward to working with you on advancing this bill through to enactment.

Thank you for your excellent leadership on behalf of individuals at the end of life. We look forward to working with you on this and other legislation.

Sincerely,

Edo Banach, J.D.  
President and CEO