

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 9, 2014

Marilyn Tavenner
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Tavenner:

We write regarding the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) rulemaking process and its impact on rural health care providers.

Recognizing the importance of rural providers and in response to concerns raised by Members of Congress, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 included language to request CMS better account for the realities of rural health care delivery and coordinate with the Office of Rural Health Policy at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

In response, the CMS FY2015 Budget Justification included language simply stating that CMS must coordinate with the HRSA Office of Rural Health Policy and receive recommendations from the White House Rural Council. Despite this assertion, several policies remain problematic for rural providers and facilities, including the outpatient therapy supervision requirement and the 96 hour rule. We remain concerned these policy decisions do not reflect the reality of providing care in rural communities, and we request additional details on these consultation efforts in advance of future rulemaking.

Specifically, we ask CMS share additional information regarding: the process for considering and incorporating the rural impact throughout the rulemaking process; the metrics and surveillance of rural health care systems that are used to inform policy analysis; stakeholder engagement in advance of the open comment period; and monitoring activities to assess the impact of a final regulation on costs and access to care in rural areas after implementation.

The proportion of elderly rural Americans continues to grow, and even small policy changes or incremental payment adjustments have a significant impact on access to care in rural areas. Medicare beneficiaries should be able to obtain care within their own communities when possible, and we are committed to ensuring federal policies recognize and incorporate the unique challenges rural providers face.

On behalf of the health care providers and health systems across the country, we appreciate your attention to these concerns as we work together to strengthen rural health care delivery. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator



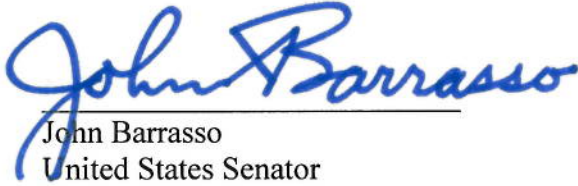
John Thune
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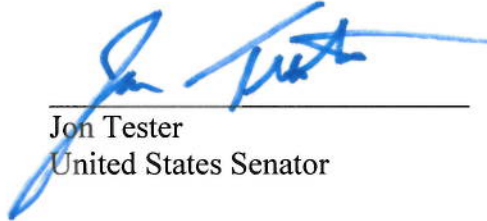
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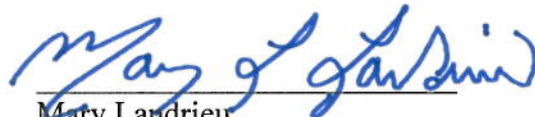
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Jon Tester
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United States Senator



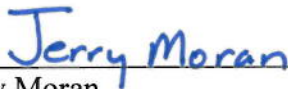
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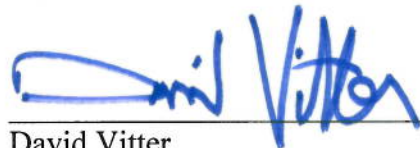
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Mark Kirk
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United States Senator



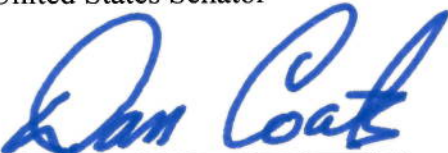
David Vitter
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Michael Enzi
United States Senator



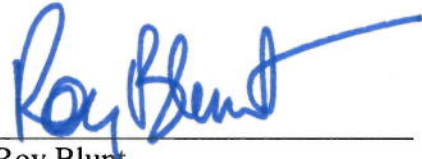
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Richard Burr
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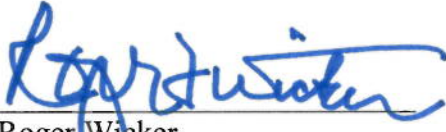
Roy Blunt
United States Senator



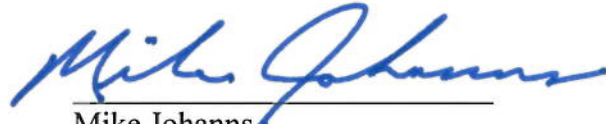
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Tammy Baldwin
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Roger Wicker
United States Senator



Mike Johanns
United States Senator



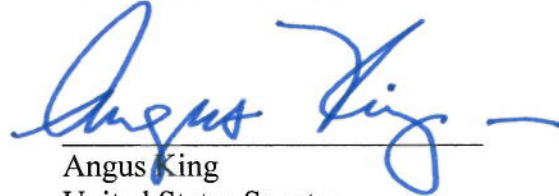
Mark Pryor
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Claire McCaskill
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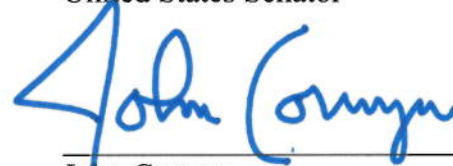
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United States Senator



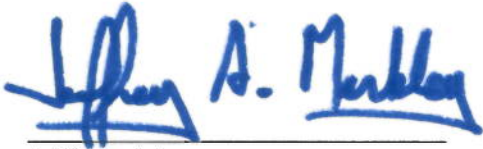
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