

June 23, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Room S-309, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
Majority Whip
U.S. Senate
Room S-208, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Thune and Majority Whip Barrasso:

On behalf of the undersigned clinician and other professional organizations, we respectfully urge the Senate to include the Medicare payment provision in the House-passed One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1) in the legislative package currently under consideration in the Senate. This provision represents a critical step toward stabilizing the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) and protecting access to care for seniors and individuals with disabilities who rely on trusted clinicians in their communities. It also helps promote competition by supporting community-based small businesses.

House leadership recognized the urgent need to rectify the failures of previous Congresses by prioritizing a significant first step towards long-term reform in its first major legislative package. Section 44304 of H.R. 1 ties the MPFS to inflation by establishing a permanent, annual update based on the Medicare Economic Index, beginning in the next plan year. The provision reflects policy principles that physician and other clinician stakeholders have long advocated for.^{1, 2} Moreover, it reflects many members across both chambers, who have long asked for prior Senate leaders to prioritize their communities.^{3, 4, 5}

Under the Medicare program, the MPFS sustains access to entire care teams, including physicians, dentists, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, occupational and physical therapists, audiologists, and professional staff who work together to deliver coordinated, high-quality care to your communities. This access is at risk. While Congress has intervened in prior years to soften the impact of some reductions, it failed to prevent the 2025 payment reduction, further compounding the persistent undervaluation of clinician services. When adjusted for inflation, for example, Medicare physician payments have already declined by 33 percent since 2001, and the consequences are painfully visible.⁶

¹ American Medical Association, Characteristics of a Rational Medicare Payment System, 2022, <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/characteristics-rational-medicare-payment-principles-signatories.pdf>.

² Congress of Neurological Surgeons, AANS and CNS Join Groups Urging Congress to Provide Physicians with Inflation-Based Medicare Payment Update, September 10, 2024, <https://www.cns.org/advocacy/legislative-affairs-detail/new-powerpoint-201>.

³ U.S. Senator John Boozman, Press Release: Boozman, Welch Lead Letter Calling for Legislative Solution to Protect Access to Medicare Services, February 23, 2024, <https://www.boozman.senate.gov/press-releases?ID=38E4F449-331B-4C57-BDCA-934B1D7010C7>.

⁴ U.S. Senator Roger Marshall, MD, Press Release: Senators Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Protect Seniors' Access to Healthcare, August 1, 2024, <https://www.marshall.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senators-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-protect-seniors-access-to-healthcare/>.

⁵ U.S. Senator John Boozman, Press Release: Boozman, Welch Lead Push to Protect Access to Medicare Services, November 26, 2024, <https://www.boozman.senate.gov/press-releases?ID=3E2D8327-0D91-4531-8D21-6009BAE94971>.

⁶ American Medical Association, Chart: Medicare Updates Compared to Inflation in Practice Costs (2001 – 2025), <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2025-medicare-updates-inflation-chart.pdf>.

Clinician-led practices care for around 33.9 million Americans enrolled in Original Medicare, nearly half of all Medicare beneficiaries.⁷ More than 3.3 million individuals are under age 65 and qualify for Medicare due to disabling conditions and end-stage renal disease.⁸ In the most rural areas, nearly 58 percent of Medicare beneficiaries are covered by traditional Medicare, where access to reliable care remains essential and increasingly fragile.⁹ Between 2019 and 2024, rural areas lost nearly 9,500 independent physicians and experienced a 42 percent reduction in independent rural medical practices.¹⁰ As a result, fewer than 12,500 independent physicians currently serve these communities. If Congress continues to delay action, access to primary and specialty care will continue to erode, forcing patients to travel long distances, leave their communities, or wait until their health deteriorates into an emergency that's harder and more expensive to recover from.

At the same time, congressional inaction has fueled ongoing consolidation and market distortions that affect patients nationwide. Today, the largest employer of physicians is Optum, a subsidiary of the UnitedHealth Group and an entity currently the subject of lawsuits and federal investigations. Congress can act to rein in further concentration of market power and address the threats to the viability of local community-based practices.

We strongly urge you to reinsert the House-passed provision in the Senate package. Allowing another year to pass without action will only accelerate the very consolidation and access challenges that Congress has consistently said it aims to prevent – issues that have been the focus of bipartisan concern and multiple legislative efforts. Following the conclusion of this budget reconciliation process, we hope you will support the re-launch of the bipartisan Medicare payment reform working group.¹¹ As members of that group, you and the Senate Finance Committee leaders explored reforms to payment adequacy, alternative payment models, chronic care management, telehealth, and workforce shortages, as well as other strong policies.¹² We believe this renewed effort will enhance Section 44304 into meaningful, long-term stability.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this request. We stand ready to work with you to protect Medicare access, support clinicians, and ensure that rural and underserved communities are not left behind.

Sincerely,

American Association of Neurological Surgeons

Congress of Neurological Surgeons

American Society of Anesthesiologists

American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons

⁷ U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Medicare Monthly Enrollment, <https://data.cms.gov/summary-statistics-on-beneficiary-enrollment/medicare-and-medicare-reports/medicare-monthly-enrollment>.

⁸ CMS, Medicare Monthly Enrollment Data Dictionary, <https://data.cms.gov/resources/medicare-monthly-enrollment-data-dictionary>.

⁹ Freed, M., Biniek, J. F., Sroczynski, N., & Neuman, T. (2025, April 10). Most people in the most rural counties get Medicare coverage from traditional Medicare. Kaiser Family Foundation. <https://www.kff.org/medicare/issue-brief/most-people-in-rural-areas-get-medicare-coverage-from-traditional-medicare/>.

¹⁰ Physicians Advocacy Institute, PAI-Avalere Report: Rural Areas Face Steep Decline in Independent Physicians and Practices, <https://www.physiciansadvocacyinstitute.org/PAI-Research/Rural-Physician-Employment-and-Acquisition-Trends-2019-2024>.

¹¹ U.S. Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, Press Release: Cortez Masto, Blackburn, Thune, Barrasso, Stabenow, Warner Announce Formation Of Medicare Payment Reform Working Group, February 9, 2024, <https://www.cortezmastosenate.gov/news/press-releases/cortez-masto-blackburn-thune-barrasso-stabenow-warner-announce-formation-of-medicare-payment-reform-working-group/>.

¹² U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, Press Release: Wyden and Crapo Release White Paper for Medicare Doctor Pay Reform, May 17, 2024, <https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/wyden-and-crapo-release-white-paper-for-medicare-doctor-pay-reform>.

Academy of Doctors of Audiology
Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses
ADVION (formerly National Association for the Support of Long Term Care)
Alliance for Physical Therapy Quality and Innovation
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants
American Academy of Audiology
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Emergency Medicine
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery
American Academy of Pain Medicine
American Academy of Sleep Medicine
American Association of Clinical Urologists
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodagnostic Medicine
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
American College of Gastroenterology
American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Internists
American College of Rheumatology
American Epilepsy Society
American Gastroenterological Association
American Medical Society for Sports Medicine
American Medical Women's Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Optometric Association

American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society
American Physical Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association Academy of Hand and Upper Extremity
American Podiatric Medical Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons
American Society of Dermatopathology
American Society of Nuclear Cardiology
American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine
American Society of Shoulder and Elbow Surgeons
American Society of the Hand Professional Organization
American Society of Transplant Surgeons
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
American Urogynecologic Society
American Urological Association
APTA Private Practice
Association for Clinical Oncology
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
Association of Women in Rheumatology
Community Oncology Alliance
Digestive Health Physicians Association
Free2Care
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Pain and Spine Intervention Society
J. Robert Gladden Orthopaedic Society
National Association of Spine Specialists
North American Neuromodulation Society
North American Spine Society

Orthoforum

Renal Physicians Association

Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions

Society of Critical Care Medicine

Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates, Inc.

Society of Neurological Surgeons

Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

United Physical Therapy Association