

July 17, 2003

The Honorable William Thomas
Chairman
House Committee on Ways & Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways & Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thomas and Grassley and Ranking Member Rangel and Baucus:

We would like to express our sincere appreciation, and full support, for Congressional efforts to improve access, quality and equity for all rural Americans. We appreciate the inclusion of rural provider provisions within H.R.1 and S. 1, the Prescription Drug and Medicare Improvement Act of 2003. It is critically important these provisions are enacted this year.

Approximately 22 percent of Americans living in non-metropolitan areas are Medicare beneficiaries. Rural residents tend to be older, poorer, and use more health services than their urban counterparts. Despite this heavy reliance on the Medicare system, Medicare expenditures per rural beneficiaries are approximately 18.4 percent lower than expenditures per urban beneficiary.

Rural health care providers are struggling with an intrinsically unfair Medicare reimbursement system. This system has created a financial crisis which severely jeopardizes the ability of rural Americans to receive timely quality care. The rural provisions included within the Medicare bills take a large step in providing equitable reimbursements to a wide variety of rural providers.

We strongly urge you to maintain your support for rural Americans within the Conference Committee process, and ensure that meaningful rural provisions are included within the final Medicare reform package.

Sincerely,

The National Rural Health Association
Alabama Rural Health Association
Arizona Rural Health Association
California State Rural Health Association
Delaware Rural Health Initiative
Florida Rural Health Association
Hawaii State Rural Health Association
Illinois Rural Health Association
Kau Rural Health Community Association

Kentucky Rural Health Association
Louisiana Rural Health Association
Maine Rural Health Association
Maryland Rural Health Association
Michigan Rural Health Association
Minnesota Rural Health Association
Mississippi Rural Health Association
Missouri Rural Health Association
Nebraska Rural Health Association
New England Rural Health Roundtable
New Mexico Rural Health Association Coalition
New York State Rural Health Association
Rural Health Association of Oklahoma
Pennsylvania Rural Health Association
South Carolina Rural Health Association
Rural Health Association of Tennessee
Texas Rural Health Association
Rural Health Association of Utah
Virginia Rural Health Association
Washington Rural Health Association