

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 19, 2015

COSPONSOR THE HOME HEALTH CARE PLANNING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2015 (S.578)

Dear Colleague,

We are writing to urge you to join us as cosponsors of the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2015 (S.578) to ensure that our seniors and disabled citizens have timely access to home health services under the Medicare Program.

Nurse practitioners (NP), clinical nurse specialists (CNS), certified nurse midwives (CNM), and physician assistants (PA) play an increasingly important role in the delivery of primary health care services, particularly in rural and medically-underserved areas where access to a physician may be in scarce supply. In recognition of their growing role, Congress, in 1997, authorized Medicare coverage for the physician services provided by these professionals as long as they are within the scope of practice defined by state laws, such as physician supervision guidelines.

Despite their expanded role in the health workforce, these clinicians are currently unable to order home health services for their Medicare patients. Medicare recognizes these clinicians' role for the rest of the care they provide in home health settings, but requires a physician's signature to initiate or certify a home health episode, even if state law says otherwise.

For many patients, these providers serve as their main source of care, especially in areas where a physician isn't always readily available. In such situations, this impediment merely amounts to extra administrative and paperwork burden, and creates an unnecessary step that fails to recognize current training and scope-of-practice guidelines. As a result, patients in need of home health care services are either placed in more expensive health care settings, or experience a delay in receiving the care they need.

The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2015 would ensure that our Medicare beneficiaries get the home health care they need in a timely manner by allowing NPs, CNSs, CNMs and PAs, to order home health services, if their state allows it. This bill also eases a burden with a new requirement that providers must perform a face-to-face encounter between a patient and a provider prior to certification for home health services. Current law does allow these non-physician providers to substitute for the physician for the purposes of this face-to-face requirement. It does not, however, allow these providers to sign the final care plan at the end of the process. The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2015 would give these clinicians that flexibility and authority.

S. 578 is supported by AARP, the National Association for Home Care and Hospice, the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the American College of Nurse Midwives, and dozens of other national organizations.

For more information, or to sign on as a cosponsor, please contact Priscilla Hanley with Senator Collins (4-5364) or Veronica Duron with Senator Schumer (4-6542).

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator