



March 11, 2021

The Honorable Fred Keller
United States House of Representatives
1717 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Keller,

The Rural Hospital Coalition supports the needs of rural communities across the country by advocating for hospitals with Rural Referral Center, Sole Community Hospital, and Medicare Dependent Hospital designations under the Medicare program. Our member hospitals are pleased to support H.R. 1749, the Reviewing Urban and Rural Adjustment to Level Hospital Expenses and Lopsided Payments (RURAL HELP) Act.

As you know, delivering high quality, cost-efficient care to vulnerable populations is a particular challenge for those in rural areas, where communities face unique barriers to healthcare coverage and access. Patients in rural communities are more likely to face chronic or life-threatening illnesses, such as diabetes or coronary heart disease, as well as mental health challenges.¹ For these patients, rural hospitals serve as the primary source of care. However, these hospitals increasingly face negative operating margins due to lower volumes and the complex care they provide.

The RURAL HELP Act would help address these inequities by directing the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct an evaluation of Medicare reimbursement rates received by both urban and rural hospitals. Depending on the results of the report, HHS would also be required to make necessary payment adjustments. This important legislation would shed light into the financial challenges facing rural hospitals and the payment mechanisms that drive continued imbalances. Specifically, the RURAL HELP Act will lead HHS to reevaluate

¹ Kapral Moira K., Austin Peter C., et al. "Rural-Urban Differences in Stroke Risk Factors, Incidence, and Mortality in People With and Without Prior Stroke." *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* 12, no. 2 (February 1, 2019): e004973. <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.118.004973>.

Medicare Severity-Diagnosis Related Group (MS-DRG) payments, which systematically and disproportionately disadvantage rural hospitals.²

By compelling HHS to identify and address these disparities, this bill will help ensure rural hospitals across the country can continue to serve their communities. The Coalition thanks you for reintroducing this legislation and urges Congress to pass the RURAL HELP Act, supporting the needs of rural hospitals and the communities they serve.

Sincerely,



Eric Zimmerman

² Letter to CMS Administrator from Members of Congress, March 13, 2020, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c13fd4150a54f21cf0140ad/t/5e6f8659d6472a12fd97a796/1584367199376/MS-DRG+Letter+to+CMS.pdf>