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Alliance for Rural Hospital Access Applauds Introduction of the Assistance for Rural Community Hospitals Act

Bipartisan Bill Will Better Enable Rural Hospitals to Serve Their Communities

Washington, DC (December 5, 2023). The Alliance for Rural Hospital Access is pleased to support the Assistance for Rural Community Hospitals (ARCH) Act (H.R. 6430), introduced by Representatives Carol Miller (R-WV) and Terri Sewell (D-AL).

Hospitals located in rural areas face unique challenges in delivering high-quality, cost-efficient care to their communities. Patients in these areas are more likely to face chronic or life-threatening illnesses, and rural hospitals often serve as their primary source of care. At the same time, rural hospitals are increasingly strained by negative operating margins, often due to lower patient volumes and more complex conditions. H.R. 6430 recognizes these challenges and takes steps to better enable rural hospitals to overcome these obstacles.

The legislation would extend the Medicare Dependent Hospital (MDH) program and the Low-Volume Hospital Payment Adjustment for five years, providing vulnerable hospitals with a period of predictable Medicare reimbursements and greater financial stability. In addition, H.R. 6430 would instruct the US Government Accountability Office to report and provide recommendations on rural hospital classifications, including the projected effects of updating Medicare reimbursement formulas Sole Community Hospitals (SCHs) and MDHs that are paid on the basis of their hospital-specific rate. This is a step in the right direction toward providing for a much-needed update to the current base years for SCHs and MDHs.

“Representatives Miller and Sewell recognize the unique challenges that rural hospitals face, and they understand the need for Congress to pass legislation supporting these safety net providers,” said Eric Zimmerman, a representative for the Alliance for Rural Hospital Access. “We thank the Representatives for their efforts to safeguard the ability of rural hospitals to serve their patients and communities.”

The Alliance encourages Congress to extend the MDH program and low-volume payment adjustment in advance of September 30, 2024—the current expiration date of the payment extensions.

About the Alliance for Rural Hospital Access

The Alliance for Rural Hospital Access (ARHA) is a coalition of more than 50 hospitals nationwide with Medicare Dependent Hospital (MDH), Sole Community Hospital (SCH), and/or Rural Referral Center (RRC) status. The Alliance works to defend and enhance benefits for hospitals with these designations, so they can remain financially viable and continue to provide high-quality care to the communities they serve. For more information, please visit <https://ruralhospitalaccess.org/>.