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**Congressman Tim Ryan, Ohio Businesses and Patients Urge Support for Bill to Eliminate “Competitive” Bidding for Home Medical Equipment**

*H.R. 3790 Would Eliminate the Misguided Bidding Program While Reducing Spending, Preserving Access to Quality Care, and Saving Thousands of Small Businesses.*

COLUMBUS, OH (February 5, 2010) — In a telephone briefing for media yesterday, Congressman Tim Ryan (D-Ohio), along with Ohio homecare providers, and a local homecare patient, highlighted the negative impacts of the controversial Medicare “competitive” bidding program on home medical equipment providers and the patients who rely on their services.

This bidding process, which is under way in nine metropolitan areas across the U.S. including Cincinnati and Cleveland, could force small medical equipment providers out of the marketplace (even if they agree to lower reimbursement rates) and make it harder for the millions of patients who rely on homecare to access the medically required equipment and services.

The Ohio Association of Medical Equipment Services hosted yesterday’s conference call. Participants on the call pointed out that home-based care is already the most cost-effective setting for post-acute care and that the home medical equipment sector has endured 10 years of deep and disruptive reimbursement cuts under Medicare.

**U.S. Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH-17)** joined the call to voice his support for **H.R. 3790**, a bill that would eliminate the infamous bid program and, at the same time, reduce Medicare spending, preserve access to quality homecare, and save thousands of small businesses.

“‘Competitive bidding’ sounds good, but it will only reduce access to care, choice, and quality of care for thousands of homecare patients,” said Ryan. “With the economy just starting to recover, now is not the time to adopt ‘competitive’ bidding, which will kill jobs and small businesses.”

H.R. 3790, introduced by Rep. Kendrick Meek (D-Fla.), has already gathered strong bipartisan support from **140** members of Congress (**including 13 out of the 18 members of Ohio’s House delegation**), and numerous disability groups, including Cerebral Palsy Association of Ohio, Ohio Society for Respiratory Care, the ALS Association, the American Association of People with Disabilities, International Ventilator Users Network, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Emphysema/COPD Association, National Spinal Cord Injury Association and Post-Polio Health International.

J.D. Jones, a 49 year old Medicare patient with pulmonary hypertension, described the personal threat posed by competitive bidding to patients.

“When we had a blackout in 2007, I called my homecare provider and was able to rely on him for batteries for my ventilator and other home equipment devices to keep me going during the outage. Under competitive bidding, I would have had to put calls in to several different providers during an emergency, none of whom I know or trust.”

Also joining the call to speak out against the bidding scheme: John C. Reed, the director of Cincinnati-area home medical equipment supplier PRO2 Respiratory Services and board member of the Ohio Association of Medical Equipment Services, J.D. Jones, an Ohio homecare patient, Joe Petrolla, president, Seeley Medical and Anthony LaCute, MBA, JD, director of legislative and regulatory affairs, Seeley Medical.

“Even if my company eliminated every employee, additional cuts would have to be made to offset the severe reduction in fees from the program,” said John Reed. “Believing that this level of reduction won’t affect patient service, access to care and quality of care is naive at best and misleading to the Medicare beneficiaries who depend on our employees who serve them.”

Homecare providers serve the medical needs of the millions of Americans who require oxygen equipment and services, power wheelchairs, inhalation drug therapy, home infusion, hospital beds, diabetic supplies, and other medical equipment, supplies, and services in the comfort of their homes. The Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 mandated that Medicare begin implementation of a competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment. This program was delayed by Congress on July 15, 2008, 15 days after it started, due to the serious fundamental, procedural and operational flaws.

Medicare data shows that there were 4,127 durable medical equipment providers in the nine affected bidding areas and when the winning bids were announced, that number decreased to 376 – a reduction of more than 90% of existing providers. Eliminating such an overwhelming percentage of providers from the program will impact patient choice and access to cost-effective medical care and threaten the economic survival of the companies involved.

*The Ohio Association of Medical Equipment Services (OAMES) is a non-profit trade organization established in February 1981 for the purpose of advocating the interests of home medical equipment (HME) providers throughout Ohio. OAMES is the premier Ohio source for industry business information, education, networking and a voice on state and national government issues affecting the HME services industry.*

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