



Providing quality healthcare at home

PRESS RELEASE

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Congressmen, Patient Representatives and Businesses Address Why Medicare “Competitive” Bidding Will Hurt Patients and Businesses on Call with Media

Representatives Altmire and Thompson Address the Value of Homecare and the Importance of Eliminating the Flawed Bidding Program

HARRISBURG, PA (November 17, 2009) — The Pennsylvania Association of Medical Suppliers (PAMS) hosted a media conference call today where congressmen and representatives of Pennsylvania patients and businesses spoke out against the controversial Medicare “competitive” bidding program for home medical equipment and services. Over the past year, numerous experts have said that this competitive bidding process — which is scheduled to begin in several metropolitan areas this year — could force small medical equipment providers nationwide out of the marketplace and make it harder for the millions of patients who rely on homecare to access the specialized equipment and services that they need.

U.S. Representatives **Jason Altmire (D-PA-04)** and **Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-PA-05)** joined the call to voice their support of **H.R. 3790**, a bill that would eliminate the bid program and at the same time reduce Medicare spending, preserve access to quality homecare, and save thousands of small businesses. The bill, introduced by Rep. Kendrick Meek, D-FL, on October 13th, has already gathered strong bipartisan support from 70 members of Congress, and numerous national disability groups.

“CMS’s competitive bidding program was flawed from the beginning, and unfortunately it is has not improved over time,” U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) said. “There is still ample reason to believe that CMS’s competitive bidding program would greatly hurt small businesses and make it harder for seniors to obtain the specialized medical equipment that they need. The common sense legislation we have proposed would eliminate this flawed program and protect seniors and small businesses without adding one penny to the federal deficit.”

“Competitive bidding, as CMS has framed it, is anything but competitive,” said U.S. Congressman Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-5). “Looking at savings solely on a balance sheet is not a smart government solution. If the number of smaller home providers of durable medical equipment declines, I’m concerned that more home care patients will need to be hospitalized, particularly in rural areas because of their distance from one of the massive contract holders.

CMS should be working to keep homebound Medicare recipients in their homes—the quality of life is better for the patient and will involve an overall cost savings to Medicare.”

The Congressmen were joined on the call by **Lucy Spruill**, Director of Public Policy and Community Relations, United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh; **Georgie Blackburn**, VP Government Relations and Legislative Affairs, BLACKBURN'S, and **John Shirvinsky**, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Association of Medical Suppliers.

“As a power wheelchair consumer, I am very concerned about the small number of providers that will be available as a result of competitive bidding,” said Lucy Spruill, Director of Public Policy and Community Relations, United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh. “We already experience long waits between ordering equipment and actual delivery. This will take a very bad situation and make it intolerable. Medicare needs to be concerned with secondary conditions that may arise due to fewer providers being available to serve our needs. Bed sores, pneumonia and depression due to longer stays in the house are all very costly conditions for the Medicare system to treat.”

“The Medicare bidding program underestimates both the value of home-based care to its own financial well being and the high importance that Medicare consumers place on quality, choice and reliable local access to home medical care,” said John Shirvinsky, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Association of Medical Suppliers.

“‘Competitive bidding’ does not accurately portray this illogical program,” said Georgie Blackburn, VP Government Relations and Legislative Affairs, BLACKBURN'S. “Providers do not bid on specified product or specified volume. The ONLY common denominator is the bid must be lower than the current allowable.”

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.

In 2008, Medicare data shows that there were 4,127 durable medical equipment providers in the nine affected bidding areas. 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.

PAMS is the statewide organization that represents providers of home medical equipment and supplies throughout Pennsylvania. PAMS' members are in the business of helping people with serious health issues live comfortable lives in their own homes.

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