



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE
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April 28, 2016

The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Heitkamp:

The American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) is an organization whose mission in part is to serve as an advocate for patients with pulmonary disease so that they have access to and receive the highest quality of care in a safe and consistent manner.

AARC, which represents the interests of over 170,000 respiratory therapists across the country, has become very concerned that as the nationwide implementation of Medicare's Competitive Bid Program for Durable Medical Equipment (DME) continues the health of our pulmonary patients is being jeopardized as access to needed and prescribed respiratory equipment is diminished or in some cases not available. This is especially true in rural areas of the country where the available number of suppliers, the distances, and the cost of providing equipment to rural beneficiaries simply is not comparable to the urban and suburban areas now under the Competitive Bid Program.

S. 2736, the Patient Access to Durable Medical Equipment (PADME) Act introduced by you and Senator Thune would extend the transition of the roll out of the DME Competitive Bid program into rural and non-compete areas until September 30, 2017. Moreover, this delay would allow the new reimbursement formula revisions that began this January more time to be assessed and evaluated for its impact on all Medicare beneficiaries.

Respiratory therapists treat patients with chronic pulmonary disease and provide clinical care and services to pulmonary patients across the continuum of care. Respiratory therapists have the expertise to assure that Medicare pulmonary patients have access to these critical elements in their homes.

The AARC and our members are very much aware of the struggles many of our pulmonary home care patients are having in receiving the full range of Medicare services, in particular respiratory-related DME for which they are eligible and which they desperately need.

Medicare beneficiaries with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) including emphysema and chronic bronchitis, as well as those diagnosed with other pulmonary diseases, require a diverse array of respiratory equipment and frequently rely on the uninterrupted use of such equipment in order to live or, at the very least, maintain their expected quality of life.

S. 2736 provides a temporary delay in order to assess the impact on Medicare patients of the significant revisions to the reimbursement structure under the DME Competitive Bid Program.

As advocates for pulmonary patients everywhere, AARC urges Congress to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Salvatore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "F" and "S".

Frank Salvatore, RRT, FAARC
President