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Medical
Association
of Georgia

Building a Better State of Health Since 1849

December 5, 2009

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: H.R. 3590 Independent Medicare Advisory Board

Dear Sen. Chambliss:

I am writing on behalf of the physicians of Georgia to urge you to support Sen. Cornyn's Motion to Commit H.R. 3590 to the Committee on Finance with instructions to remove the provisions that establish an Independent Medicare Advisory Board (IMAB). The physicians of Georgia strongly oppose the provisions of the bill that create the IMAB for several reasons.

First, Medicare payments to physicians will be unfairly targeted for savings. The IMAB created under H.R. 3590 is required to make proposals to reduce the per capita growth rate in Medicare spending in those years that spending is projected to exceed the targets set forth in the bill. Many areas in which saving could be achieved are off limits. The IMAB is prohibited from proposing savings gained by restricting benefits, modifying eligibility or increasing contributions from beneficiaries (i.e. cost sharing). As a result, payments to physicians who actually provide the care Medicare patients need will become a primary target for savings. This comes at a time when Medicare payments to physicians are already subject to expenditure targets that have caused many physicians to opt-out of the Medicare program. The ultimate result of the IMAB construct will be to drive more physicians out of the Medicare program making it increasingly difficult for Medicare patients to access medical care.

Second, the bill gives the appointed 15 member IMAB unprecedented authority to impose these cuts. The bill requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to implement IMAB proposals unless Congress affirmatively acts. If Congress does act, alternatives are subject to the same limitations imposed on the IMAB unless both Houses of Congress vote to waive these restrictions by a three-fifths super majority. The IMAB proposals are not subject to administrative or judicial review.

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In sum, the IMAB provisions of H.R. 3590 gives unprecedented authority to a politically appointed board that is required to obtain savings from limited sources that will ultimately result in decreased access to medical care for Medicare patients.

Thank you for considering the views of Georgia's physicians to return H.R. 3590 to committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David A. Cook".

David A. Cook
Executive Director/CEO

DAC/dc