September 29, 2015

The Honorable Andrew M. Slavitt
Acting Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
Department of Health and Human Services
7500 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Mr. Slavitt:

As longstanding proponents of improving colorectal cancer screening rates among Medicare beneficiaries, we are writing in regard to the disconcerting cuts to colonoscopy in Medicare’s Physician Fee Schedule proposed rule. Our goal is to reduce barriers to colorectal cancer screening in a manner that is also consistent with the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) collaborative goal of 80 percent screening rates for the recommended population by 2018. Colorectal cancer screening is unique in that recommended screening is designed to prevent cancer from occurring in the first place.

Together, HHS and Congress have made tremendous strides in improving screening rates – no other country can boast the positive momentum we have had in saving lives from this disease. According to the American Cancer Society, colorectal cancer incidence rates in the United States have dropped more than 30 percent over the past decade – the large declines over the past decade have been largely attributed to the detection and removal of precancerous polyps as a result of increased colorectal cancer screening.

However, colorectal cancer is still the number two cause of cancer related deaths in the United States and more must be done to increase the screening among Medicare beneficiaries, who are at high risk of colorectal cancer. Medicare beneficiaries account for two-thirds of the more than 133,000 new cases of colorectal cancer each year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine concludes that removing precancerous polyps through colonoscopy can not only reduce the risk of colorectal cancer but also reduce the number of deaths from the disease by 53 percent. We strongly agree that we must continue to increase access to and utilization of services such as colorectal cancer screening, which have been historically underutilized.

In light of the Agency’s pending proposal to reduce Medicare fee for service reimbursement for colorectal cancer screening and colonoscopy by 10 to 20 percent next year, we feel compelled to express concern that these cuts could jeopardize recent progress and a budding public health success story. Accordingly, we hope you will carefully consider the solicited stakeholder comments on the proposed rule before determining whether cuts of this magnitude are justified by the evidence and are in the interests of Medicare beneficiaries. We remain hopeful that Congress and the Agency can work together to implement consistent policies to further reduce colorectal cancer incidence and mortality.
Together we can help to facilitate this “80 percent by 2018” goal and we look forward to strengthening the Medicare program on behalf of our constituents and Americans nationwide.

Sincerely,

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Leonard Lance
Member of Congress

Tom Price, M.D.
Member of Congress

Robert A. Brady
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

Erik Paulsen
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress

Joe Heck, D.O.
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress

Scott R. Tipton
Member of Congress
Jackie Walorski
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Steve Womack
Member of Congress

David P. Joyce
Member of Congress

French Hill
Member of Congress

Denny Heck
Member of Congress

Devin Nunes
Member of Congress

Tim Walz
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Chris Collins
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Scott H. Peters
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Pat Tiberi
Member of Congress

Brad Wenstrup
Member of Congress
Robert J. Dold
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Alma Adams
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David Scott
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Anna G. Eshoo
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Mark Pocan
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Brian Babin
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Phil Roe
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Ted Lieu
Member of Congress
Richard Nugent
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Rodney Davis
Member of Congress

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

Joe Barton
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

Peter A. Defazio
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Tom Rooney
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Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress

Charlie Dent
Member of Congress

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

James Sensenbrenner Jr.
Member of Congress