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June 23, 2008

The Honorable John D. Dingell
United States House of Representatives
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles B. Rangel
United States House of Representatives
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell and Chairman Rangel:

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) wishes to extend our great appreciation for the strong rural health care provisions included in H.R. 6331, the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008. These provisions will do much to protect the fragile rural health care safety net.

The NRHA is a national nonprofit membership organization with more than 18,000 members that provides leadership on rural health issues. The Association's mission is to improve the health of rural Americans and to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research.

As you know, rural health care providers are scheduled to receive steep cuts in Medicare reimbursement rates on July 1 unless Congress takes action. Such cuts are catastrophic in rural America where a disproportionate number of elderly Americans live. These seniors are per capita older, poorer and sicker (with greater chronic illnesses) than their urban counterparts. Additionally, recruitment and retention of providers to much of rural America is often daunting. Provider shortages are rampant throughout many rural and most frontier regions.

The NRHA applauds your efforts to prevent these devastating cuts. Additionally, H.R. 6331 also includes several other critical provisions for rural providers which, cumulatively, create a rural package that will help both protect the rural health safety net and the health of tens of millions of seniors who call rural America home.

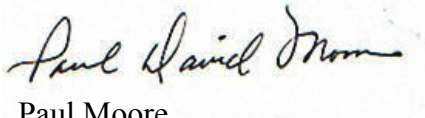
H.R. 6331 focuses on strengthening primary care and takes significant strides in protecting rural seniors' access to care by correcting certain long-standing inequities between rural and urban providers. However, it is regrettable the bill allows a modest bonus to physicians who practice in physician scarcity areas to expire. This important program is a crucial incentive to ease the difficulties that many rural areas experience in recruiting and retaining physicians and we hope that its elimination will be reconsidered.

Additionally, the NRHA appreciates the reform of certain aspects of Medicare Advantage Private-Fee-for-Service Plans (MA PFFS). The NRHA supported the intention of MA PFFS plans to give rural seniors a choice in their Medicare coverage. However, implementation has not always lived up to these

intentions. Rural seniors deserve clarity and transparency and rural providers deserve prompt and fair payment from MA PFFS plans. Efforts in this legislation to limit certain inappropriate marketing tactics are needed. In addition, some rural providers have struggled with a process known as “deeming.” The elimination of this process in certain situations is a positive one.

Thank you both for your continued concern for the health of rural Americans. So many enduring inequities in health care must be faced by rural patients and providers daily. H.R. 6331 offers critical assistance and will go far to improving the health of millions of rural Medicare beneficiaries. Thank you for your commitment to rural America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul David Moore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Paul Moore
President