

Opening statement of Chairman Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging hearing September 19, 2012

I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I'd also like to thank our Ranking Member, Senator Bob Corker, for chairing this hearing on CMS's plans to stop paying for mobility devices that are not medically necessary or meet Medicare payment criteria. He and his staff have put a lot of time and effort into these issues.

Sen. Corker and I agree that we need strong oversight on the billions of dollars in spending for Medicare and Medicaid. As part of that oversight, we need to be sure expensive medical devices are going to the people who actually need them. Our expert witnesses will speak to those points today.

While I applaud CMS for attempting to correct serious payment problems uncovered by the HHS Inspector General's Office, there are legitimate questions we must explore concerning whether these problems have been adequately addressed. CMS itself admits the durable medical equipment is chronically troubled by widespread fraud and waste.

At the same time, while industry has criticisms of CMS that need to be heard, they, too, must be active participants in any reform efforts. For one thing, as we'll learn today, medical device equipment providers have received millions of dollars in overpayments from the government. These overpayments have not always been reimbursed in a timely manner. That needs to change, and I'd like to know what steps will be taken to ensure faster repayments.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses. I now turn the hearing over to Senator Corker.