May 15, 2019

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 445–G
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Verma:

As steadfast supporters of innovations in rural health care delivery, we are writing you today to encourage you and your staff to work with us and stakeholders in our home State of Kansas during fiscal year 2019 and beyond in establishing a pilot program for new models of care for rural hospitals. The Senate Report to accompany the FY2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, subsequently passed by Congress as part of H.R. 6157, contains the following section:

Rural Health Care Facilities.—The Committee encourages CMS to work with States and associations of rural hospitals to allow program flexibility to demonstrate sustainable service delivery model options for rural communities, focused on preserving access to emergency care services and supporting future financial viability of rural facilities.

As you know, rural America faces major demographic challenges in terms of both a declining and aging population base. Nonetheless, these Americans deserve a health care system that works for them, and the delivery of such care will occur predominantly at rural hospitals. CMS payment models for hospitals in very rural areas haven’t changed for over twenty years, and the current system often doesn’t reflect either the physical or financial realities such hospitals currently face.

To that end, the Kansas Hospital Association recently commissioned a study to determine what a new model of care might look like. The findings of this study, in addition to work done by the American Hospital Association and the National Rural Health Association, point to a model where very rural hospitals be allowed to explore different payment models that would spend Medicare dollars efficiently while maximizing both access to and quality of care. We believe that this could be a win-win for both rural Kansans and American taxpayers, and this pilot program is designed to test that theory.
We have been informed that the Kansas Hospital Association has initiated discussions with HHS regional and intergovernmental affairs staff on a how to begin implementation of this important proviso. We support their ongoing efforts and encourage you and your staff to fully engage with them in an ongoing basis. Thank you for your kind attention to this letter, and please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Pat Roberts  
United States Senator

Jerry Moran  
United States Senator

Roger Marshall, M.D.  
Member of Congress

Ron Estes  
Member of Congress

Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress

Steve Watkins  
Member of Congress