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April 10, 2019

Sent via email

The Honorable Joe Courtney
U.S. House of Representatives
2332 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
400 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: The Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2019 (H.R. 1682/S. 753)

Dear Senator Brown, Congressmen Courtney, and Congressman Thompson,

On behalf of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), I am pleased to write in support of your bipartisan legislation, The Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2019, which will fix an arbitrary Medicare policy that excludes coverage of skilled nursing care for certain patients. Founded in 1964, The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,400 surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lung, and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The mission of the Society is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.

STS commends you for seeking to ensure that Medicare covers post-acute care by counting time spent under “observation status” towards the required three-day hospital stay for coverage of skilled nursing care. Current Medicare policy often results in patients being designated as “outpatient” while being held under observation status, thus preventing them from qualifying for the benefit of skilled nursing care. As a result, these patients either return home without the treatment they need, or face huge bills after their stays in a skilled nursing facility. Your legislation is an important step towards reducing unexpected out-of-pocket costs for Medicare beneficiaries and improving access to care.

STS remains fully committed to improving the quality, safety, and efficiency of care for all patients. We look forward to working with you on this issue. Please contact Courtney Yohe Savage, STS Director of Government Relations, at cyohe@sts.org or 202-787-1230 should you need additional information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Robert S.D. Higgins, MD
President