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HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT, LABOR, AND PENSION



Joe Courtney  
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August 30, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Speaker  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
Office of the Senate Majority Leader  
S-221, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boehner  
House Minority Leader  
Office of the House Minority Leader  
H-204, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
Office of the Senate Minority Leader  
S-230, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, House Minority Leader Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Reid, Senate Minority Leader McConnell:

The sustainable growth rate (SGR) was passed in 1996 with the objective of slowing growth in Medicare spending. However, the only outcomes that the SGR has managed to achieve are to undermine the strength of the Medicare program and to threaten access to care for Medicare beneficiaries. And while the problems associated with the SGR are nothing new, the delay in passing a permanent fix has raised concerns of the pending cuts to unprecedented levels, with a 23 percent cut slated to take effect on December 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. The need to pass a permanent fix has never been greater, and I would urge you to prioritize a permanent solution, like the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act, which the House passed in November 2009.

Over the August District Work Period, I met with dozens of physician and senior advocacy groups and without fail, the common denominator of concern was the pending SGR cuts set to take effect in three short months from now. During these discussions, I was particularly struck by the announcement of the Mansfield Family Practice in my district. Beginning in two weeks from now on September 15<sup>th</sup>, Mansfield Family Practice will no longer accept new Medicare patients because of the looming SGR cuts. In its 30 years of existence, this is the first time that the practice will turn away new Medicare beneficiaries.

With the exception of 2002, Congress has never let the cuts take effect. However, the frequency of insufficient fixes in 2010—four patches that lasted mere months—was likely the tipping point for Mansfield Practice and, I fear, many more like it around the country. While Congress remains unlikely to actually let these cuts take effect, the looming uncertainty of the SGR cuts has created a fragile system that many health care providers fear that they can't rely on to provide fair, stable reimbursement.

The SGR was seriously flawed when it was created in 1996 and it remains seriously flawed now. If Congress fails to pass a permanent fix, confusion and uncertainty will continue to impact patient care and physician practices. I would strongly encourage you to make this a priority when Congress comes back into session in September.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe Courtney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress