



July 5, 2023

The Honorable Michael Bennet  
Senator  
261 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Senator  
357 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Estes  
Congressman  
2234 Rayburn House Office Building

The Honorable Suzan DelBene  
Congresswoman  
2330 Rayburn House Office Building

Dear Senator Bennet, Senator Blackburn, Representative Estes, and Representative DelBene,

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is writing to thank you for introducing the Protecting Air Ambulance Services for Americans Act (S. 1803/H.R. 3691) and encourage your continued efforts to see it signed into law.

NRHA is a non-profit membership organization with more than 21,000 members nationwide that provides leadership on rural health issues. Our membership includes nearly every component of rural America's health care, including rural community hospitals, critical access hospitals, doctors, nurses, and patients. We work to improve rural America's health needs through government advocacy, communications, education, and research.

The Protecting Air Ambulance Services for Americans Act helps ensure that rural Americans have the same lifesaving access to air medical services as those who live in urban areas. This issue is particularly relevant for rural Americans who lack the availability of a community hospital or medical center. Since 2010, more than 150 rural hospitals have been forced to shutter. Over 40% of rural hospitals are operating with negative margins and therefore vulnerable to closure. Consequently, this necessitates increased utilization of emergency air medical services to fill those coverage gaps and transport patients longer distances.

Despite the importance of access to air ambulance services, the current Medicare reimbursement rate for emergency air services is woefully inadequate. This rate has not been meaningfully updated in over two decades and does not reflect the current cost of providing air medical transport. As a result, air ambulance providers are reimbursed at less than 50 percent of the actual cost of air medical services, threatening the ability of providers to operate since Medicare beneficiaries account for nearly 40 percent of all transports.

This reimbursement shortfall is compounded by economic headwinds stemming from the pandemic and inflationary pressures. This has been devastating for air ambulance providers as many have been forced to operate at a financial loss. Further, there are 37 fewer air medical bases from 2021 to 2022, worsening the strain and putting the lives of patients in rural areas at further risk.

To provide an accurate picture of true costs, Congress passed the No Surprises Act to require CMS to collect transport data from the air medical industry. The Protecting Air Ambulance Services for Americans Act builds on this by authorizing CMS to use the provided data to update the reimbursement rate.

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50 F. St., N.W., Suite 520

Washington, DC 20001 | 202-639-0550



Getting the reimbursement level correct is a matter of life and death for millions living in rural communities. NRHA supports the Protecting Air Ambulance Services for Americans Act and we urge swift passage of this legislation to ensure that all Americans have access to lifesaving air ambulance services, regardless of where they live.

Thank you again for your support of rural health care and the Protecting Air Ambulance Services for Americans Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Morgan", is written over a light gray dotted grid background.

Alan Morgan  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Rural Health Association