

**Administrative Office**

521 E 63<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Kansas City, Missouri 64110-3329  
Telephone: [816] 756.3140  
FAX: [816] 756.3144



**Government Affairs Office**

1600 Prince Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2836  
Telephone: [703] 519.7910  
FAX: [703] 519.3865

The Honorable Fortney "Pete" Stark  
Chairman, House Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Health  
239 Cannon House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Stark:

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) strongly applauds your efforts to strengthen the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), make health care more affordable and accessible for low-income seniors, and protect the fragile rural health care safety net. H.R. 3162, *The Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007 (CHAMP Act)* is critical to rural children and seniors across the nation.

As you know, children in rural areas depend on Medicaid or SCHIP for health insurance more than children in urban areas. Rural populations tend to be poorer than their urban counterparts and illnesses associated with poverty, including infant mortality, are more pronounced in rural areas. Due to distances, difficulty in SCHIP enrollment, and the drop in private sector insurance coverage in rural America, many eligible rural children are not enrolled in SCHIP. According to a 2007 study, America's rural children have become *the neediest* of our uninsured population. The CHAMP Act will dramatically improve the plight of America's rural children.

Additionally, the CHAMP Act protects rural seniors' access to care. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural populations tend to be older and poorer with higher rates of chronic disease. The health care safety net is critical to providing care for this vulnerable population. Several payment provisions, vital to the sustainability of rural providers, recently expired or soon will expire, thereby critically jeopardizing the rural health care safety net and seniors' access to care. The NRHA strongly supports the extensions of critical rural Medicare access protection provisions that are contained in the CHAMP Act.

Mr. Chairman, the NRHA also appreciates your efforts to correct serious problems within the Medicare Advantage (MA) program. We applaud efforts to require proper disclosure of plan benefits to seniors as well as oversight for questionable marketing practices. Additionally, many of these plans fail to comply with the reimbursement requirements for rural facilities as established in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. MA plans that do not fairly reimburse rural providers have the potential of devastating the rural health care safety net. We look forward to

**[www.NRHArural.org](http://www.NRHArural.org)**

working with Congress to address this inequity and other payment inequities within the Medicare program.

Mr. Chairman, you are truly a champion for improving the health of all Americans. Rural children and rural seniors across the nation will benefit greatly from the CHAMP Act. The NRHA strongly supports your efforts looks forward to working with you to make this bill even stronger for the benefit of rural America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George N. Miller".

George Miller  
President, NRHA