

November 30, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) applauds your leadership to work with all stakeholders to advance a common sense approach to encouraging medical innovation through the 21st Century Cures Act. On behalf of ASTRO's more than 10,000 members that treat more than one million cancer patients each year with life-saving radiation oncology care, we support the 21st Century Cures Act and urge Congress to pass the bill during the 114th Session.

Not only does 21st Century Cures provide additional support for existing medical research programs, it paves the way for advancements and additional innovations in research and treatment for cancer and across medicine. ASTRO has long supported strong, sustainable funding for the National Institutes of Health and National Cancer Institute to ensure that medical breakthroughs are not threatened. As our understanding of cancer has evolved, so must the technologies used to treat it. This bill goes a long way to support clearer pathways to achieve that goal.

In addition, we are encouraged that the legislation acknowledges that innovation will only come through meaningful collaboration and data sharing. We particularly appreciate the inclusion of language to require electronic health record technologies, as a condition of certification by the Office of National Coordinator, to be capable of sharing data with clinician-led clinical data registries. We also support the language giving the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the power to investigate and take enforcement action against improper information blocking by EHR technologies. These provisions will go a long way toward ensuring such registries can collect the data they need to improve the quality of care and follow-up treatment provided to patients and penalize entities interfering with those efforts.

Also, ASTRO is pleased that the legislation aims to address the lack of transparency and stakeholder involvement in local coverage determinations (LCDs) in Medicare. ASTRO believes Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) should be required to include – at the outset of the process – a description of the evidence the MAC considered when drafting an LCD, as well as the rationale for

denying coverage. If this information is not provided until the final LCD, it hinders meaningful stakeholder exchange and can make a MAC's decision to deny coverage a fait accompli. While the provision included in Cures is an encouraging first step, more must be done to ensure that all stakeholders can participate.

ASTRO shares Congress' commitment to modernizing our health care system, and this legislation provides a meaningful step to moving medical research forward in a way that expedites treatments and cures.

Sincerely,

Laura Thevenot
Chief Executive Officer

ABOUT ASTRO

ASTRO is the premier radiation oncology society in the world, with more than 10,000 members who are physicians, nurses, biologists, physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and other health care professionals who specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. As the leading organization in radiation oncology, the Society is dedicated to improving patient care through professional education and training, support for clinical practice and health policy standards, advancement of science and research, and advocacy. To learn more about ASTRO, visit www.astro.org.