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June 10, 2016

The Honorable John Thune
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
Sh-110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Thune and Heitkamp:

On behalf of the COPD Foundation and the COPD community I am writing to express our support for S. 2736, the DME Stabilization Act of 2016, important legislation that you recently co-introduced.

The COPD Foundation is a non-profit organization established to undertake initiatives that result in expanded services for COPD and improve the lives of individuals affected by COPD. COPD is an umbrella term used to describe progressive lung disease, such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, refractory (non-reversible) asthma, and some forms of bronchiectasis. This disease is characterized by increasing breathlessness and symptoms include; chronic coughing and wheezing.

COPD affects over 30 million individuals in the United States and over half of them have symptoms of COPD and do not know it. It is the nation's third leading cause of death and second leading cause of disability. Over 1 million patients rely on supplemental oxygen to maintain active, healthy, and engaging lives. Countless studies have documented that the use of supplemental oxygen extends the life of its dependent patients as well as improving their quality of life, health outcomes and overall wellness. Further studies indicate that the mobility of patients greatly increase the same results and improve emotional health as well.

Yet, with the roll out of competitive bidding nationwide oxygen access has become less certain for COPD patients. The more portable and lighter, liquid oxygen is no longer available from many DME companies and choice and delivery options are being cut, leaving patients scrambling to keep up with the changes.

The DME Stabilization Act would extend the current roll out of competitive bidding by delaying the next rate cut for non-competitive bidding areas, adjusting the bid ceiling, and requiring the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid to consider a number of factors of service including the average travel distance, costs associated with furnishing items and services in the region when issuing payment rates. The COPD Foundation is also pleased that S2736 includes patient-centered requirements like requiring CMS to further engage stakeholders and to track and publicly post complaints and outcomes. Many of these provisions are especially vital to rural providers who have struggled to remain competitive with rates being set by larger, more urban providers.

Each day COPD patients experience additional challenges accessing life-saving oxygen and the changes instituted by the DME Stabilization Act of 2016 will be one important step towards restoring access to safe, quality and appropriate oxygen therapy. The COPD Foundation urges members of Congress to join you both in supporting this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Kephart".

Craig Kephart