



December 11, 2011

The Honorable
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC, 20515

RE: Protect Assistive Devices for Individuals with Disabilities and Chronic Conditions

Dear Representative:

The undersigned members of the Independence to Enhance Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition strongly oppose policies proposed in the context of repealing the SGR formula that could restrict access to assistive devices and technologies for people with disabilities and chronic conditions. The consumer-led coalition raises awareness in Congress of the importance of assistive devices, technologies, and related services in enhancing the function, independence, health status, and quality of life of people with disabilities and chronic conditions of all ages.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is currently embarking on a radical restructuring of the reimbursement process for certain categories of durable medical equipment (DME). The DME competitive bidding program has gone through a number of revisions, both in Congress and at the agency level, and the program was delayed and the first round has been bid twice in an effort to ensure the program is working correctly.

The ITEM Coalition has expressed misgivings about the competitive bidding program for DME in the past, but has stopped short of opposing the program because CMS and Congress were committed to strong consumer protections and review throughout the process. However, Congress is now considering proposals that would speed up the process so that all devices, both currently eligible and ineligible under the competitive bidding program, would be bid in 2012. This dramatic change in the timing of the program would severely undermine efforts to monitor affects on beneficiaries' ability to access these devices.

Congress also has before it policies that would require pre-payment review for power wheelchairs and payment reductions through competitive bidding or fee restructuring for home oxygen. Both power wheelchairs and oxygen supplies are critical to the health and independence of individuals with disabilities. Given the dramatic changes already being undergone in the DME field, we request that Congress delay further changes and avoid speeding up the processes that would make it difficult to assess the impact on access for individuals that need these devices.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please don't hesitate to contact Peter Thomas, ITEM Counsel, with any questions at 202-466-6550 or Peter.Thomas@ppsv.com.

Sincerely,