October 29, 2021

Honorable Tom Cole
U.S. House of Representatives
2207 Rayburn House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Ron Kind
U.S. House of Representatives
1502 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for Fairness for Rural Medicare Beneficiaries Act

Dear Representatives Cole and Kind,

On behalf of OCHIN, I applaud your leadership and offer strong support for the Fairness for Rural Medicare Beneficiaries Act of 2021. OCHIN is a national nonprofit health information technology and research network that offers technology solutions, informatics, evidence-based research, and policy insights for providers in rural and other underserved communities. This bill would remove a significant impediment to access faced by patients in rural communities by changing a Medicare policy that requires patients seeking care at rural critical access hospitals (CAHs) to pay more in coinsurance than patients who receive the same care at larger acute care hospitals. This is one step Congress can take immediately to increase access. We welcome partnering with you to further improve health care options and access for patients throughout rural America.

OCHIN serves nearly 1,000 community health care sites with 21,000 providers in 47 states, reaching nearly six million patients. OCHIN works with our network members to improve the integration and delivery of health care services across a wide variety of practices—with an emphasis on safety net clinics and small practices as well as critical access and rural hospitals. Furthermore, OCHIN helps hundreds of health care providers connect to high-speed broadband networks to improve access to quality health care for medically underserved and rural populations, and reduce broadband costs.

In rural communities, risk factors include geographic isolation, limited job opportunities, higher rates of health risk behaviors, and limited access clinical specialists. CAHs and other small, rural hospitals are the essential access point for patients and higher coinsurance results in delayed care, higher acuity before care is sought, or chronic conditions that could have been addressed through prevents. These worse outcomes result in higher overall cost to the Medicare program. All too often rural hospitals are the sole local source for patient care in rural communities and are more likely to offer additional services that otherwise would not be accessible to residents. It is essential therefore that patients in rural communities do not face higher financial hurdles to accessing care.
Please contact me at stollj@ochin.org as OCHIN welcomes the opportunity to work together to address the structural barriers to quality healthcare faced by patients in rural areas and the challenges faced by their community-based providers.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Stoll
Executive Vice President
Government Relations & Public Affairs