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Kerry, Alexander Introduce Medicare Patient IVIG Access Act to Ease Lifesaving Treatment

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.), a senior member of the Finance Committee, and Lamar Alexander (R – Tenn.), a senior member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today introduced legislation that will allow Medicare beneficiaries to access life-saving treatment for immune system disorders. Senators Ron Wyden (D – Org.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) are original cosponsors.

The Medicare Patient IVIG Access Act will protect the six to ten thousand patients who suffer from Primary Immunodeficiency Disease (PIDD) and require intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) treatment to maintain a healthy immune system. Currently, Medicare payment procedures prevent doctors from purchasing IVIG products at Medicare reimbursement rates, delaying or preventing patients from receiving this life-saving treatment.

“We need comprehensive health care reform, but right this minute, no matter what else we do, we need immediate help for patients who depend on IVIG to stay healthy,” said Sen. Kerry. “Today some of our most vulnerable seniors are caught in costly, bureaucratic red tape which prevents life-saving treatments. Addressing this problem will increase the quality of life for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities who are suffering and lower costs for clinics and medical providers.”

“Increasing access to these immune-system treatments is crucial for those whose lives might otherwise be threatened by diseases the rest of us overcome almost effortlessly,” said Sen. Alexander. “This bill will help these Americans improve their quality of life.”

“IVIG therapy is vital for patients in Rhode Island and around the country who are facing challenging, and sometimes life-threatening, illnesses like chronic lymphocytic leukemia and primary immunodeficiency disease,” said Sen. Whitehouse. “This bill will help lift barriers to these essential treatments so that those who need IVIG can get it safely and at lower cost.”

Nearly 70 percent of PIDD patients use IVIG to maintain their health and quality of life. PIDD are disorders in which part of the body’s immune system is missing or does not function properly. These diseases are caused by intrinsic or genetic flaws in the immune system and not by outside factors.

Last year, Kerry and Alexander each wrote to the Bush Administration to express their concerns over a proposed payment rule by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to eliminate the Medicare pre-administration fee for IVIG in doctors’ offices and outpatient facilities.

The Immune Deficiency Foundation (IDF), GBS/CIDP Foundation International, the Jeffrey Modell Foundation (JMF), the Clinical Immunology Society (CIS), and the National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF) all support the Senators’ legislation.

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