

# United States Senate

January 30, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Verma:

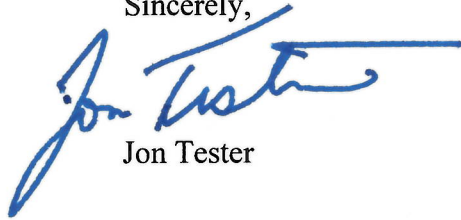
I write today to relay concerns from my constituents about the changes in provider reimbursement rates in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) 2020 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Final Rule, published on November 15, 2019. Based on reports from several Montana providers, I am concerned that the cuts to reimbursement rates in 2021 for physical therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, and other providers will compromise patients' access to care, particularly in the most remote areas of my state and across the country.

The nation's aging population and the multiple chronic conditions many seniors face necessitate an integrated care model, both to ensure seniors' independence as they age in their communities and to minimize health complications and expenses. Medicare beneficiaries increasingly rely on physical therapy and occupational therapy services as part of this coordinated model of care. For seniors who live in rural areas, access to physical therapists is particularly critical as many of these frontier communities do not have access to a full-time physician. In addition, there is a nationwide shortage of medical providers to meet the growing demand, a problem that is also particularly acute in rural areas. As a result, any significant reduction in reimbursement rates for Medicare providers will not only exacerbate existing shortages but will also serve as a disincentive for future providers to enter the profession and practice in rural regions. I am concerned that all these factors combined will undermine access to care for seniors and individuals with disabilities across Montana.

Payment decisions like the ones in this final rule will limit the provision of services. The physical therapists and occupational therapists in Montana operate on very narrow margins, and any reimbursement reductions may jeopardize their ability to remain open and serve their patients. According to several reports, CMS received thousands of comments with similar concerns, particularly from practices in remote areas. I take very seriously the concerns of these providers, particularly when it comes to a potential negative impact on patient access and care, and hope that CMS does the same.

Before these rates are implemented on January 1, 2021, I ask that CMS reconsider and more closely examine the impact of these changes on access to care in rural communities. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure our seniors have the best access to care with the provider of their choice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester