



Honorable William M. Thomas  
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means  
1136 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), we want to convey our appreciation for your efforts to expand access to hospice care and to express our support of H.R. 1, *"The Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003."* In particular, we applaud your including provisions to strengthen the Medicare hospice benefit. Thank you for your leadership in moving this bill forward and, in particular, for your support of hospice care.

*"The Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003"* includes several provisions that are important to the Medicare hospice benefit. NHPCO strongly supports these provisions and believes these changes will improve the quality and timeliness of hospice and palliative care for seniors and their families.

First, the bill provides Medicare beneficiaries and their physicians the option of seeking consultative services from hospice physicians prior to the beneficiary electing the hospice benefit. It is our hope that by allowing Medicare beneficiaries access to the expertise of hospice and palliative care professionals, the physicians will not only improve the quality of their care, but also increase their awareness of, and comfort with, the full range of services provided under the Medicare hospice benefit when it is an appropriate choice of care in the course of their illness. Since Medicare-certified hospices are the recognized experts in the field of palliative care, this provision will allow providers and patients to call upon their expertise for the purpose of consulting on pain and symptom management, advanced care planning and other care options.

Second, H.R. 1 recognizes the important contribution of non-physician practitioners and enhances continuity of care by allowing these health

care professionals to continue being actively involved in their patient's care after the patient elects the Medicare hospice benefit.

Third, we are also very pleased that you provide hospice programs with the ability to contract with other Medicare certified hospices to provide "core services" under certain circumstances, which will remove unnecessary regulatory burdens and give greater flexibility to both hospice providers and Medicare beneficiaries.

We hope to continue working with you to improve the quality of health care for Medicare beneficiaries. Indeed, this is accomplished by strengthening the Medicare hospice benefit, and protecting this important care option for those who wish to die with dignity in the setting of their choice, surrounded by family. We look forward to working with you to secure enactment of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Donald Schumacher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

J. Donald Schumacher  
President and CEO