



June 16, 2003

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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 for passage of your "*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 this area and for your unwavering support of hospice care.

We are very pleased that your bill provides Medicare beneficiaries with more timely information about hospice services. In addition, you provide hospice programs with the ability to contract for certain "core services" which will remove unnecessary regulatory burdens and provide more focused care to Medicare beneficiaries. Finally, your bill enhances continuity of care by allowing nurse practitioners to continue being actively involved in their patient's care after the patient elects the Medicare hospice benefit.

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

Sincerely,

J. Donald Schumacher, Pys.D.
President and CEO