

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman John W. Olver (D-1st District) introduced legislation to protect transportation to and from medical appointments for Medicaid beneficiaries. This transportation benefit, known as Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT), is essential because without transportation services, people are placed at risk of missing routine or preventive care which can lead to more costly care and hospitalization.

“There are approximately 4 million rural and urban families and children participating in the Medicaid program whose sole means of transportation to medical care is through NEMT,” Congressman John Olver said. “We cannot simply abandon these people. It is critical that they have access to preventive care so that they don’t end up in our emergency rooms for higher cost procedures that could have been prevented.” The loss of the transportation benefit would be particularly harmful to people living in rural communities.

“This service is especially important for those living in rural areas where there may not be public transit options,” Congressman John Olver said. “As Chairman of the Transportation and Urban Development Appropriations Committee, one of my primary goals has been to bolster support for public transportation. However, I realize that public transit is not always an option in rural communities. For many low income people in rural areas, there may be no affordable way to get to their doctor’s office. That’s what makes continuing to provide this service so very important.”

Dale Marsico, Executive Director of Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), said, “Thank you to Representative Olver for taking the lead to protect this critical Medicaid benefit. Congressman Olver is the leading advocate for addressing the transportation needs of his constituents as well as citizens across the country. For those less fortunate, including senior citizens, people with disabilities, dialysis patients and mothers with young children, access to non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) offered under Medicaid is often the only way for them to get to and from needed medical treatment. This legislation simply safeguards NEMT as a standard benefit under Medicaid and is a straightforward solution to ensure that Medicaid patients have access to medical care.”

On February 22, 2008, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published a proposed rule which would allow states with benchmark plans to opt out of providing NEMT.

This proposed regulation would devastate access to medical services for millions of Medicaid beneficiaries. The bill Congressman Olver introduced would stop the implementation of the CMS proposed rule.

Currently, eight states have benchmark plans: Kentucky, West Virginia, Idaho, Kansas, Virginia, Wisconsin, South Carolina and Maine. However, each state has the ability to create a benchmark plan with its legislature's approval. With the approval of this proposed rule, benchmark states could opt out of providing the essential benefit.

Congressman Olver introduced this bill, even though Massachusetts does not have a benchmark plan, to safeguard the benefit for residents of the eight states that do have benchmark plans and for those who may develop such plans in the future.

"I am quite fortunate to be a Representative from a state that has always been a leader in providing quality, affordable health care for all," Congressman John Olver said. "There are times in this job when one must act on behalf of the greater good. This proposed rule strikes me as economically short-sighted and flat-out wrong. Every person should have equal access to medical care in this country."

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