



July 23, 2012

The Honorable Kent Conrad  
530 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Conrad:

AARP is pleased to endorse the Craig Thomas Rural Hospital and Provider Equity Act of 2011 (S. 1680). Currently, only physicians can certify home health services. Your bill would add physician assistants as eligible providers who can order hospice care. Your bill would also add certified nurse-midwives and clinical nurse specialists to the list of eligible health care providers who can conduct face-to-face encounters with patients. More importantly, your bill would allow nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, clinical nurse specialists, and physician assistants to certify for home health services for Medicare beneficiaries. Coverage of valuable mental health services provided by marriage and family therapists is also included. These changes will increase consumer access to vital care, particularly for your most vulnerable constituents, in areas that are often medically underserved.

AARP is committed to the idea that consumers should have access to health care providers who are qualified, educated, and certified to provide high quality primary care, chronic care management, mental health care, and end-of-life care, regardless of setting. Your bill benefits consumers by:

- Removing unnecessary barriers to care in allowing qualified providers to conduct patient encounters, coordinate discharge plans and order continuing care;
- Reducing the potential for delays in treatment in areas that often experience a shortage of physicians;
- Making it possible for more Americans to stay in their homes and out of more costly care settings; and
- Alleviating burdens on populations for whom seeking treatment can be difficult—seniors in particular.

Ensuring access to this care increases the likelihood that beneficiaries will experience a higher quality of life, and choice and dignity in end-of-life decisions.

AARP appreciates your bipartisan leadership in helping to improve hospice and home health care access for Medicare beneficiaries by allowing advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants, and mental health professionals to order and certify these services. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues important to older Americans. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Winifred Quinn on our Government Affairs staff at (202) 434-3750.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joyce A. Rogers".

Joyce A. Rogers  
Senior Vice President  
Government Affairs