



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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For immediate release
August 29, 2013

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State Legislators Urge Keeping Critical Access Hospital Definition

Over eighty legislators sign letter to Wisconsin Congressional Delegation in support of CAHs

(*Wisconsin State Capitol*) – In response to a report recently issued by the federal Office of Inspector General (OIG) that would affect the designation of Critical Access Hospitals (CAH) across the country, including many important rural health care centers in Wisconsin, a majority of Wisconsin state legislators have expressed their opposition to the OIG’s proposed changes to Wisconsin’s federal elected officials.

State Senators Sheila Harsdorf (R-River Falls) and Bob Jauch (D-Poplar) and State Representatives Kathy Bernier (R-Chippewa Falls) and Chris Danou (D-Trempealeau) authored a letter to Wisconsin’s Congressional Delegation urging their opposition to the proposed change in the OIG report and support of CAHs. The letter garnered the support of 77 other legislators and cited serious financial implications on rural medical facilities should the OIG’s recommendation be adopted, including the reduction in access to care for rural residents.

The OIG report recommends the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) seek legislative authority from Congress to remove the “necessary provider” designation, which would allow CMS to remove CAH designation based on distance from another hospital. This change would likely affect the designation of 53 of Wisconsin’s 58 CAHs.

“I am pleased that so many state legislators have joined us in a bipartisan manner to sign this letter,” Harsdorf stated. “We recognize that Critical Access Hospitals play a vital role in ensuring local access to health care services and providing important jobs in our rural communities. Changing CAH designation could have broad implications in rural communities throughout the state and jeopardize access to hospital care and emergency services.”

CAH designation is vital to the improvements in medical access and quality seen in rural areas and small towns across our state. Senator Bob Jauch added that “the simple fact is that many of these hospitals would not be open and the rural citizens they serve would be deprived of having access to quality health care services.”

“The critical access designation prevents many rural hospitals from closing and is essential to residents of the 68th Assembly District,” Representative Bernier said. “The loss of just one critical access hospital, like Ministry Our Lady of Victory Hospital in Stanley or Mayo Health System – Oakridge in Osseo, could mean the loss of over 100 family-supporting jobs. Should

we lose this designation, resulting in a hospital closure, it would mean a substantial hardship on rural residents. Folks would have to travel further for care, or would experience a delay in receiving care, resulting in poorer health outcomes.”

In expressing his support for CAH’s, Representative Danou stated that “Critical Access Hospitals mean a lot to rural areas. Not only do they provide job opportunities with family-supporting wages, they also provide necessary physical and mental health care options for people in the community. I’m happy to see such bipartisan support with this letter and I hope to see a bipartisan response from the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation to address this issue.”

The letter from Wisconsin state legislators to their federal elected officials was sent on August 29th and a copy of the letter was also sent to hospital administrators of Critical Access Hospitals likely to be affected by this proposed change.