

American Association of Birth Centers

America's Birth Center Resource



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Pregnant Women's Access to Care Threatened

Medicaid Birth Center Reimbursement Act (H.R. 2358 / S.1423)

U.S. Representatives Susan Davis (D-CA), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Lois Capps (D-CA), Rob Wittman (R-FL) and U.S. Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Mark Begich (D-AK) introduced the Medicaid Birth Center Reimbursement Act to ensure Medicaid birth center facility fee payments to states. Over the past few years, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has begun disallowing federal matching funds for state Medicaid payments for freestanding birth center services. Birth centers have been recognized by CMS (and earlier, by HCFA) as a Medicaid provider type in State Medicaid Plans since 1987. Recently, however, CMS has disallowed such payment by several state Medicaid Agencies, including Alaska, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington State, claiming that it lacks clear statutory authority and direction to allow these payments. CMS has directed its regional offices to stop federal payments to any state for birth center services. Texas recently lost an appeal that would have directed CMS to continue paying for birth center facility fees in the state - as it had for over 20 years. This bill will direct CMS to make payment to the states for birth center services.

This action by CMS puts pregnant women at risk of losing access to safe, high quality maternity care. Birth centers in other states are now at risk of losing this reimbursement. Here are the facts about birth centers:

- Birth centers are part of a vital safety net for Medicaid mothers across the U.S.
- Birth centers fill the void left in many areas when hospitals – rural, urban, or suburban -- close their obstetrical services
- Many rural and urban birth centers serve a disproportionately high percentage of Medicaid recipients. Texas provides two examples – at least 95% of patients in an inner city Houston birth center, over 85% for a center in Weslaco, Texas in the Rio Grande Valley
- Birth centers have a proven history of reducing low birth weight and preterm birth, the main causes of neonatal death in the U.S.
- Birth centers provide innovative approaches to maternity care that reduce disparities for low income and minority women, lower cesarean section rates, and reduce health care costs
- The U.S. needs a network of birth centers to provide alternatives to busy hospitals for mothers and babies during an epidemic, natural calamity, or other disaster

Congress must act now!

Congressional Budget Office estimates a cost savings of at least \$47 million.

Co-sponsor this legislation directing CMS to pay birth center facility fees immediately!

Inaction means more Medicaid mothers will give birth in emergency rooms – without midwives or OBs

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