

The Rural Access to Hospice Act of 2019

Sponsored by Senator Shaheen (D-NH) and Senator Capito (R-WV)

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and Rural Health Centers (RHC) form an important part of the healthcare “safety net” and provide primary care to over 27 million Americans. For some patients, especially in rural communities, FQHCs and RHCs are their only source for primary care.

Currently, a statutory barrier inhibits senior’s access to hospice in rural communities across the country. When patients enroll in hospice, they select a physician or nurse practitioner to serve as their attending physician. Typically, the attending physician is reimbursed for these services under Medicare Part B. Unfortunately, RHCs and FQHCs do not bill Medicare under Part B. This technical glitch keeps some patients from having the primary care physician they know and trust serve as their attending physician while in hospice care.

The Rural Access to Hospice Act will allow RHCs and FQHCs to receive payment for physicians’ services while acting as attending physicians for their patients in hospice care. In 2003, Congress passed legislation that allowed RHC and FQHC physicians to bill Medicare separately for their services in a skilled nursing facility. This legislation provides a similar technical fix, and will promote the use of hospice care among rural, hospice-eligible beneficiaries.