

KENT CONRAD
NORTH DAKOTA

website: <http://conrad.senate.gov>

COMMITTEES:
BUDGET, CHAIRMAN
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
FINANCE
INDIAN AFFAIRS

United States Senate

June 22, 2010

1-800-223-4457

530 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3403
(202) 224-2043

220 EAST ROSSER AVENUE, ROOM 228
BISMARCK, ND 58501-3866
(701) 258-4648

657 2ND AVENUE NORTH, ROOM 306
FARGO, ND 58102-4727
(701) 232-8030

33 SOUTH 3RD STREET, SUITE B
GRAND FORKS, ND 58201
(701) 775-9601

100 1ST STREET, S.W., ROOM 105
MINOT, ND 58701-3846
(701) 852-0703

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

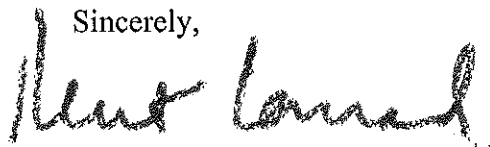
As you know, Section 2707 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act authorizes a Medicaid emergency psychiatric demonstration project that allows non-governmental psychiatric hospitals to receive Medicaid reimbursement for providing EMTALA-related emergency services. This provision is based on a bill (S. 1130) I introduced with Senator Olympia Snowe, and I helped lead the effort to get it included in the final health care reform legislation.

With a 30% decline in general psychiatric beds over the past two decades, it is getting very difficult to find beds for individuals needing emergency mental health care services. As a result, individuals with mental health emergencies are diverted to already overcrowded emergency rooms or travel long distances to receive care. Non-governmental, community-based psychiatric hospitals could help relieve this access problem.

The Medicaid Emergency Psychiatric Demonstration Project seeks to expand the number of emergency psychiatric beds available in communities by providing federal Medicaid matching funds to demonstrate that covering patients in non-governmental, community-based psychiatric hospitals will improve timely access to emergency psychiatric care, reduce the burden on overcrowded emergency rooms, and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of inpatient psychiatric care. This will help ensure Medicaid patients who need emergency mental health care get the right care, at the right time, in the right setting.

I would ask that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) move as expeditiously as possible to implement this important demonstration program. I also ask that you let my Senior Health Policy Advisor, Kate Spaziani, and my Deputy Health Policy Advisor, Dana Halvorson, know the timeline for the implementation of the demonstration program, as well as the HHS staff working on the demonstration. Kate and Dana can be reached at 202-224-2043 or kate_spaziani@conrad.senate.gov and dana_halvorson@conrad.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Kent Conrad
U.S. Senator