July 29, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-222
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

The undersigned state and national medical societies, representing hundreds of thousands of frontline physicians, thank you for your continued efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, this public health crisis is stressing physician practices more than any time in our country’s history. Unfortunately, despite the fragility of physician practices, some see an opportunity to include surprise medical billing provisions in the next COVID-19 relief package. America’s physicians strongly agree that it is critical to protect patients from surprise medical bills, and we firmly believe that a thoughtful, measured federal solution is possible to achieve. However, now is not the time to adopt divisive surprise billing legislation.

It is important to note that physicians who have received emergency funding cannot balance-bill coronavirus patients, thus helping ensure that patients do not receive a surprise medical bill during the pandemic. Furthermore, the medical community remains committed to working with Congress to seek a broader solution that protects patients from unanticipated medical bills when their insurer fails to provide them with an adequate network of physicians. At the same time, it is imperative that any solution should facilitate a process to quickly, efficiently, and fairly resolve physician and health plan billing disputes.

As conversations regarding a final compromise solution continue, physicians strongly believe that the following provisions are essential to any surprise medical billing legislative solution to ensure patients’ continued access to quality care:

- Patients must be protected and should only be responsible for their in-network cost-sharing amounts, including deductibles, when receiving unanticipated medical care.

- To keep patients out-of-the-middle of any payment disputes between health plans and providers, provide physicians with direct payment/assignment of benefits from the insurer.

- Following the delivery of out-of-network medical care, a reasonable payment should be paid to providers. A benchmark payment rate set at median or mean in-network contract rates or some percentage of Medicare is insufficient because it fails to recognize nuances in individual patient care, will increase health care costs by accelerating consolidation in the health care market, jeopardizes the emergency care safety net and restricts patient access to in-network physicians.

- If the provider determines that the insurer’s payment is not reasonable, there must be a fair, accessible and equitable independent dispute resolution (IDR) process to resolve payment disputes. An accessible IDR process must not be restricted to claims above a specific dollar
amount/threshold. Providers should also not be limited to accessing the IDR process only after a “cooling off” period. To maximize administrative efficiency, providers should be allowed to “batch” claims for the same or similar service under the same insurance provider.

Additionally, this baseball-style dispute resolution process should incorporate a set of dispute resolution guidelines that allow for equal weight to be given to the following elements to ensure a balanced and fully informed decision:

+ Rates for comparable services in the same geographic region considered reasonable based on commercial insurance rates from an independent and transparent database of all commercial payer claims data;
+ Any previous contracting history;
+ Demonstration of good-faith efforts (or lack thereof) made by either party (i.e. the out-of-network provider or the health plan) to enter into network contracts;
+ Market share held by the out-of-network health care provider or the health plan;
+ Level of training, education, experience, outcomes, and quality metrics of the physician providing the service;
+ Complexity of the services rendered;
+ Individual patient characteristics; and
+ Any additional relevant factors contributed by either party.

Any payment rate base year should be no later than 2018 and should include an appropriate mechanism to ensure that future payments keep pace with inflation.

- To prevent surprise medical bills from occurring in the first place, health plans should be held accountable for provider networks that are appropriate to meet patients’ medical needs — including ensuring access to specialists and subspecialists on a timely basis, including in a facility. Health plans must also ensure that provider directories are up-to-date and accurate. However, patients must be allowed to access elective out-of-network care when they so choose.

We thank you for your ongoing efforts to provide the resources physicians need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus has placed an extraordinary strain on our country’s physicians and hospitals, and it is, therefore, imperative that Congress refrain from actions that will further disrupt the health care system. Like you, we strongly agree that patients must be protected from surprise medical bills, and we reaffirm our commitment to devise a balanced approach. However, the complexity and multifaceted nature of the issues pertaining to surprise medical bills warrants due consideration from Congress. Any final proposal to address unanticipated medical bills should be addressed separately from any forthcoming COVID-19 relief legislation.

We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Medical Association
AMDA - The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Emergency Medicine
American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Physician Leadership
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
American Association of Clinical Urologists
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Association of Public Health Physicians
American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
American College of Cardiology
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Gastroenterology
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Osteopathic Internists
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American College of Radiology
American College of Rheumatology
American College of Surgeons
American Epilepsy Society
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society
American Osteopathic Association
American Pediatric Surgical Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery
American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society for Surgery of the Hand
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of Breast Surgeons
American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery
American Society of Echo cardiography
American Society of Hematology
American Society of Neuroradiology
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
American Society of Retina Specialists  
American Urological Association  
Association for Clinical Oncology  
College of American Pathologists  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Heart Rhythm Society  
International Society for the Advancement of Spine Surgery  
Medical Group Management Association  
National Association of Medical Examiners  
National Association of Spine Specialists  
Obesity Medicine Association  
Renal Physician Association  
Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions  
Society for Vascular Surgery  
Society of American Gastrointestinal Endoscopic Surgeons  
Society of Interventional Radiology  
Spine Intervention Society  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

Medical Association of the State of Alabama  
Arizona Medical Association  
Arkansas Medical Society  
California Medical Association  
Colorado Medical Society  
Connecticut State Medical Society  
Medical Society of Delaware  
Medical Society of the District of Columbia  
Florida Medical Association Inc  
Medical Association of Georgia  
Hawaii Medical Association  
Idaho Medical Association  
Illinois State Medical Society  
Indiana State Medical Association  
Iowa Medical Society  
Kansas Medical Society  
Kentucky Medical Association  
Louisiana State Medical Society  
Maine Medical Association  
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Massachusetts Medical Society  
Michigan State Medical Society  
Minnesota Medical Association  
Mississippi State Medical Association  
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Ohio State Medical Association
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Oregon Medical Association
Pennsylvania Medical Society
Rhode Island Medical Society
South Carolina Medical Association
South Dakota State Medical Association
Tennessee Medical Association
Texas Medical Association
Utah Medical Association
Vermont Medical Society
Medical Society of Virginia
Washington State Medical Association
West Virginia State Medical Association
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wyoming Medical Society