



**AMERICAN SOCIETY  
FOR RADIATION ONCOLOGY**

251 18<sup>th</sup> St. South, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Arlington, VA 22202

Main: 703.502.1550

Fax: 703.502.7852

[www.astro.org](http://www.astro.org) · [www.rtranswers.org](http://www.rtranswers.org)

Board of Directors

CHAIR

**Geraldine M. Jacobson, MD,  
MBA, MPH, FASTRO**

Premier Radiation Oncology Associates  
Clearwater, Florida

PRESIDENT

**Jeff M. Michalski, MD, MBA, FASTRO**

Siteman Cancer Center,  
Washington University  
St. Louis

PRESIDENT-ELECT

**Howard Sandler, MD, MS, FASTRO**

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center  
Los Angeles

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

**Laura Dawson, MD, FASTRO**

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre  
Toronto, Ontario

January 26, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United State Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Democratic Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
2433 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leaders Schumer, McConnell, Speaker McCarthy and Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO), I thank you for Congress' longstanding support for preserving access to life-saving care for cancer patients, especially high-quality radiation oncology services. Entering this 118th Congress, we hope to continue work on improvements to the health care system, including reforming Medicare payment, removing barriers to care, and increasing research funding.

ASTRO is the largest radiation oncology society in the world, representing more than 10,000 individuals who specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. ASTRO's members include radiation oncologists, nurses, medical physicists and other health care professionals who work in a variety of clinical settings including hospitals, cancer treatment centers and academic research facilities. ASTRO members treat more than 1 million cancer patients each year. As the leading organization in radiation oncology, ASTRO is dedicated to improving patient care through professional education and training, support for clinical practice and health policy standards, the advancement of research, and advocacy. As the 118th Congress moves forward on many important issues, we offer these recommendations:

**Enhance Care Quality and Value for Patients by Reforming Radiation Oncology Payment Policy**

Radiation oncology is an extremely high value service for Medicare beneficiaries, particularly when compared to oncology drug costs. Yet, Medicare reimbursement rates for radiation therapy have been cut more than 20% over the last decade, making it tougher for cancer patients to receive state-of-the art care close to home.

Combined with COVID issues and increasing costs, radiation oncology centers, and especially freestanding community-based centers, have faced significant instability that threatens their continued ability to treat patients. ASTRO urges Congress to reform the way Medicare pays for radiation therapy to:

- Stabilize payments for community-based clinics to protect their viability;
- Invest in payment modernization and care delivery innovations to reduce costs and improve quality of care; and
- Reduce inequities to help medically underserved patients access and complete treatment regimens.

### **Ensure Patients and Radiation Oncologists Make All Treatment Decisions**

Barriers to providing care, particularly prior authorization delays, disrupt prompt treatment delivery for cancer patients and infringe on the integrity of care decisions between patients and providers. More than 90% of radiation oncologists say prior authorization delays cancer treatment and research shows that delays increase cancer mortality. As congressional support continues to grow for removing these care disruptions, ASTRO urges the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to:

- Fix prior authorization to reduce physician burden and patient anxiety; and
- Maintain the integrity of care decisions between patients and their physicians.

### **Increase Cancer Research Funding that Leads to Cancer Cures and Improves Patient Outcomes**

ASTRO deeply appreciates Congress' longstanding support for cancer research. Sustained investment in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) allows our members to provide the best treatment options for patients, while flat or decreased funding will reduce the number of researchers and suppress progress in the fight against cancer. ASTRO urges Congress to:

- Increase FY24 NCI funding to \$9.988 billion and expand funding for the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) at NIH.

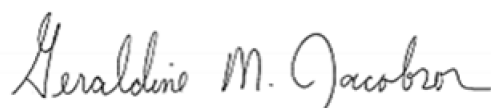
ASTRO values Congressional efforts to address the pressing health policy issues facing cancer patients and providers. We encourage action in this 118<sup>th</sup> Congress that will stabilize payments for radiation oncology providers, remove barriers to high-quality care, and invest in the future of cancer treatments and cures. If we may provide any additional information regarding these legislative priorities or be a resource on cancer policy issues, please contact Dave Adler, ASTRO Vice President of Advocacy ([dave.adler@astro.org](mailto:dave.adler@astro.org)).

Thank you in advance for your consideration of the ASTRO's priorities in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Sincerely,



Laura Thevenot  
Chief Executive Officer



Geraldine M. Jacobson, MD, MBA, MPH, FASTRO  
Chair, ASTRO Board of Directors