

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
US Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
US Senate
S230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
US House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of Advocate Health's 69 hospitals, more than 1,000 sites of care, 155,000 employees and 21,000 doctors serving 6 million patients, including more than 50,000 new cancer cases annually across Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, South Carolina and Wisconsin, **we support passage of the Radiation Oncology Case Rate (ROCR) Value-based Payment Program Act (S. 4330/H.R. 8404)** to create a more patient-centered approach to reimbursing radiation therapy services under Medicare.

Fueled by the research and innovation of our National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist, Advocate Health is working to advance health equity and improve access and affordability for the communities we serve, and radiation therapy is a critical part of our world-class multidisciplinary cancer care for our patients. **We applaud the leadership on the ROCR Act by Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) and Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), and in the House by Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), Jimmy Panetta (D-Calif.), John Joyce, MD (R-Pa.) and Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) and four other cosponsors. We believe the ROCR Act would increase patient access to care, enhance the quality of cancer treatments, reduce disparities for rural and underserved patients, and lower patient costs by saving Medicare approximately \$200 million over 10 years.**

Advances in radiation therapy are leading to more cures and fewer side-effects. Unfortunately, our ability to provide state-of-the-art care to patients in our communities is increasingly challenged by Medicare payment cuts totaling more than 20% over the last 10 years. The current Medicare fee-for-service payment system is broken for radiation oncology, failing to align reimbursement with clinical guidelines that recommend shorter courses of radiation treatment for some cancers. More Medicare beneficiaries are seeking radiation therapy, with numbers expected to continue growing as the country's population ages. Simultaneously, our radiation oncology clinics continue to face rising costs, as cutting-edge technology and highly skilled treatment teams get more expensive to acquire and maintain every year.

We appreciate Congress' bipartisan efforts to prevent additional cuts via short term patches, but we agree with the more than 70 members of the radiation oncology community that a long-term solution provided by the ROCR Act is the right path forward to ensure patients, including rural and underserved patients, can receive excellent care close to home.

Among ROCR's more promising components is an approach to reducing disparities in cancer treatment. Under ROCR's Health Equity and Achievement in Radiation Therapy (HEART) initiative, centers would receive funds to support patients who face transportation barriers accessing and completing their radiation treatments. HEART is based on a model from a National Cancer Institute-funded study that reduced disparities and increased survival. Other key features of ROCR include:

- Creating episode-based payments to align financial incentives with scientifically proven outcomes.
- Supporting shorter treatments for certain cancers, allowing patients more time to work and spend time with loved ones.
- Implementing a systematic approach to improve quality and protect patient safety through practice accreditation.
- Unifying payments across settings based on hospital technical payments.

Advocate Health is national leader in value-based care, ranking #1 in 2023 among integrated delivery networks participating in the Medicare Shared Savings Program. Passage of the ROCR Act will help us expand our value-based care and delivery system reform efforts, saving taxpayers and patients money while enhancing quality of care.

Radiation therapy is primed to make impressive gains for people with cancer, but the current Medicare payment system is prohibiting the investments necessary to further reduce cancer mortality.

We appreciate Congress' bipartisan efforts to ensure fair payments for radiation oncology services under Medicare. We look forward to working with you to pass the ROCR Act and create a new era of stable payments, higher quality care, lower costs, and reduced disparities.

Sincerely,



Ruben A. Mesa, MD, FACP

President, Atrium Health Levine Cancer

Executive Director, Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Comprehensive Cancer Center

Enterprise Senior Vice President, Atrium Health

Vice Dean for Cancer Programs, Wake Forest University School of Medicine

The Charles L. Spurr MD Professor of Medicine, Wake Forest University School of Medicine