



Senate Finance Committee Passes Health Reform Bill

Includes Medicare Equity for CNMs

On October 13, the Senate Finance Committee passed its version of health care reform out of Committee on a vote of 14 to 9. A lone Republican Senator, Olympia Snowe of Maine, voted to report the bill. Among the many positive provisions of "America's Healthy Futures Act" is a provision to reimburse CNMs at 100% under the Medicare program. The next step is for legislative leaders to work to combine the Finance Committee measure with the health care reform bill already approved by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; an amalgam of the two measures would then move to the Senate floor for consideration by the full Senate. Debate on the floor may last several weeks.

Background

On October 1, Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota offered an amendment to the Senate Finance Committee health reform proposal to provide equitable reimbursement for certified nurse-midwives under the Medicare program. The amendment passed and will now be incorporated into the Senate's health reform bill. Senator Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas spoke up on behalf of the amendment and the midwives in her state.

As a result, midwifery reimbursement equity provisions are now included in the major health reform bills in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Thus, while health reform legislation has several steps to go before it gets to the President's desk, it appears that the only thing between CNMs and 100% reimbursement for their services under Medicare is the signature of President Barack Obama. Thanks to the Conrad amendment, there is a high probability that if health reform does make it to the President's desk, it will include equitable reimbursement for CNM services under Medicare.

While this is a major step forward for the midwifery community, ACNM's parallel effort to win inclusion of certified midwives (CMs) under Medicare and Medicaid was not successful. ACNM-endorsed legislation in both the House and the Senate (H.R.1101 and S.662) provided reimbursement equity for both CNMs and CMs. Unfortunately, however, the CM provisions were not included in the final amendments which incorporated midwifery equity language into the health care reform bills. This is in part due to the fact that CMs are currently licensed in only three states (New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island). ACNM has already identified additional strategies for obtaining recognition of CMs under Medicare and Medicaid and will continue to pursue these. In addition, we continue to support efforts at the state level to win licensure and full practice equity for CMs.