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March 31, 2011

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins:

AARP is pleased to endorse the bipartisan Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act (S. 227) that you have introduced with Senator Conrad. Your bill recognizes and authorizes nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives and physician assistants as eligible health care professionals who can order home health services under Medicare. This needed change would improve access to important home health services, and potentially prevent the need for many hospital, sub-acute care facility and nursing home admissions—all of which are costly to the consumer and the taxpayer.

AARP is committed to the idea that consumers should have access to health care providers who are qualified, educated, and certified to provide high quality primary care, chronic care management, and other services that keep them living a high quality life, with dignity, in locations of their choice.

Although current law recognizes nurse practitioners and physician assistants as authorized Medicare providers, and allows these clinicians to order nursing home care for their patients, it precludes these same practitioners from ordering home health care services. This is an unnecessary barrier to care, and adds at least one more step in accessing home health care by requiring the provider to find a physician to make such a referral. In addition, it can result in an inappropriate or inadequate referral if the physician has no previous knowledge of this person. And time delays in having to locate a physician for a referral can result in an extended hospital stay or nursing home admission because the beneficiary could not be moved back or remain home without home health services.

There are decades of data supporting the ability of nurse practitioners, certified nurse midwives, and physician assistants to provide high quality care to people of all ages, including Medicare recipients with multiple chronic conditions. There is also sound evidence that clinical nurse specialists provide high quality chronic care management for consumers with multiple chronic conditions. These three types of advanced practice registered nurses are often the only care providers available in health professional shortage areas such as urban and rural regions.

Your bill would help to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries in need of home health care services whose care providers are nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse midwives, and physician assistants would be able to directly access their referrals for home health care by their provider. AARP supports your bill because it would help

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provide Medicare beneficiaries continued access to care and increase the likelihood that these beneficiaries would experience a higher quality of life.

AARP appreciates your bipartisan leadership in helping to improve home health care access for Medicare beneficiaries by allowing advanced practice registered nurses and physician assistants to order home health care services. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues important to older Americans. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact me or have your staff contact Rhonda Richards on our Government Relations and Advocacy staff at (202) 434-3770.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David P. Sloane".

David P. Sloane
Senior Vice President
Government Relations and Advocacy