



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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Baucus Expresses Concern with Hospital Accreditation Process

Senator Joins Colleagues in Introducing Legislation to Improve Safety and Quality of Hospitals

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Today, U.S. Senator Max Baucus, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, joined Chairman Charles Grassley in introducing legislation to improve the safety and quality of hospitals currently being accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). A similar measure is being introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Pete Stark (D-CA).

Hospitals are considered in compliance with Medicare participation requirements once given accreditation by JCAHO. JCAHO holds hospitals accountable to ensure safety and quality care within their facilities. In a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released today, JCAHO's accreditation process was shown to have serious deficiencies.

In response to the findings in the report, the legislation introduced today will remove JCAHO's unique status among accreditation entities and give the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) greater authority to examine the accreditation process used by JCAHO. Under this legislation, JCAHO will be required to renew their status to accredit hospitals, which will allow CMS to more closely monitor the accreditation process. CMS has this authority over other accreditation bodies, and this legislation would put JCAHO on equal footing with other accreditation bodies.

Senator Baucus released the following statement during a press conference held on the results of the GAO report this afternoon. The statement follows:

“As I can attest through personal experience, America's hospitals provide outstanding health care. Every day, thousands of people receive the treatment they need from dedicated and highly competent hospital staffs working in well-run hospitals across the country.

“But confidence in our hospitals should not be confused with complacency. Every so often, someone from outside a hospital must come in to each facility and look under the hood, so to speak -- to read through patient charts, check clinical practices and to make sure that sprinklers are working and stairways are sound. We have put our trust in accrediting

organizations to identify problems in hospitals so that they may be corrected and quality and safety improved.

“Most hospitals are accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), which has been accrediting hospitals for over 50 years. As today’s report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) shows us, JCAHO’s record of identifying problems in hospitals is far from perfect. Furthermore, the GAO points out that government has little oversight authority over JCAHO’s hospital accreditation process. Less oversight authority, in fact, compared to accrediting organizations for other kinds of healthcare facilities.

“While the GAO’s findings are a reason for concern, the report does not mean that American hospitals are unsafe. But it does send a clear message – one that the Congress and the Administration should heed – that there is room for improvement in identifying problems at hospitals. Given my commitment to keep hospitals as safe as possible, I view the GAO’s recommendations as a call to action.

“Therefore, I am pleased to join Chairman Grassley in introducing legislation to remove JCAHO’s unique status as an accreditation body and to give the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) the same authority over JCAHO’s hospital accreditation that it already has with respect to the accreditation of other healthcare facilities. Putting all accreditation bodies on equal footing will result in better accreditation and better healthcare facilities for everyone. Expanding oversight by CMS of JCAHO’s hospital accreditation will help improve the process, keep patients safe and ensure that hospitals continue to perform to our expectations.”

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