

December 15, 2009

Senator Richard Durbin
Assistant Majority Leader
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Support for Kidney Immunosuppressive Drug Amendment

Dear Senator Durbin:

As transplant stakeholders representing the majority of transplant professionals engaged in the field of organ donation and transplantation (physicians, surgeons, transplant coordinators, counselors, etc.), we want to thank you for your leadership and indicate our strong support for your amendment as filed, Durbin Kidney Immuno Drug Amendment #3102, to extend coverage of immunosuppressive drugs for kidney transplant recipients. As you know, this amendment mirrors a provision in the House health care reform bill, H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, that lifts the current 36-month limit for Medicare immunosuppressive drug coverage.

One of the biggest challenges that transplant recipients face is the lifetime commitment of immunosuppressive drug coverage after receiving a transplant. Currently, patients often find themselves unable to afford their medications once this Medicare drug coverage lapses after 36 months. Due to financial reasons, these patients are often forced to begin reducing their medications or forego them altogether, eventually resulting in failure of the transplanted kidney. If the transplant fails, Medicare incurs an average first year cost of more than \$100,000 and will pay for both dialysis and re-transplantation. Medicare spends an average of \$77,000 per year dialyzing patients with kidney failure, and Medicare covers dialysis treatments indefinitely. Removal of the arbitrary 36-month time limit on immunosuppressive drug coverage makes financial sense, for sure, but the unnecessary human toll as a result of the current policy is tragic.

Let us be clear, your amendment will save lives, many of them. It will save transplanted kidneys so that others on the organ donor waiting list can receive one of the scarce organs available. And it will save Medicare the unnecessary costs of re-dialyzing and re-transplanting patients with kidney failure who lose their graft as a result of their inability to pay for their immunosuppressive drugs. We strongly urge the Senate to include this amendment in the final health reform bill. Thank you again for your leadership and for your support of transplant patients.

Sincerely,

American Society of Transplantation

American Society of Transplant Surgeons

NATCO, The Organization for Transplant Professionals

Transplant Recipients International Organization

United Network for Organ Sharing

cc: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senator Carl Levin, Senator Robert Casey, Senator Charles Schumer, Senator Roland Burris.