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The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa De Lauro
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole, Ranking Member De Lauro, and Subcommittee Chairman Aderholt,

On behalf of the American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA), we write today to thank the Committee for its recent inclusion of key report language supporting anesthesia providers in the FY26 Labor-HHS-Education funding bill. AAAA represents over 3,000 Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants (CAAs) across the country who provide critical care to patients as members of the Anesthesia Care Team (ACT). As any final FY26 funding agreement takes shape, AAAA would like to encourage the Committee to ensure the following report language is included:

House Labor-HHS-Education Report 119-271: *"The Committee requests a briefing on how expanding the anesthesia rural pass-through program to include all types of anesthesia providers could help mitigate the health workforce shortage in low patient volume rural hospitals and the resulting delays in patient care."*

CAAs are master's-prepared anesthesia professionals who work under the direction of physician anesthesiologists within the ACT model. With certifications administered by the National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants (NCCAA), CAAs are trained to perform preoperative assessments, administer anesthesia, and manage postoperative care. CAAs are not only key members of surgical care teams, but they also enable rural hospitals to sustain consistent, high-quality anesthesia services for the communities they serve.



AAAA greatly appreciates the Committee's recognition of the challenges facing rural hospitals and the report language's directive for a briefing on how expanding the rural pass-through program to include "all types of anesthesia providers" could strengthen access to timely, high-quality care. By seeking clarity on the benefits of broadening reimbursement, the Committee is taking an important step toward ensuring that rural facilities can rely on the full anesthesia workforce necessary to maintain safe surgical services. Including this directive in the House's FY26 Labor-HHS-Education report language reflects a clear recognition of the persistent challenge rural hospitals face in recruiting and retaining qualified anesthesia providers. AAAA strongly supports its inclusion in any final FY26 funding agreement.

CMS's rural pass-through program was explicitly designed to help alleviate workforce challenges by allowing eligible hospitals to use Medicare Part A payments to hire or contract with non-physician anesthesia providers. But state-by-state licensure agreements and inconsistent regulatory frameworks have limited hospitals in utilizing the full extent of the ACT, and non-physician providers continue to face obstacles to full and equitable reimbursement. A Committee briefing – as directed by this report language – on expanding reimbursement for non-physician anesthesia providers under the rural pass-through program would add needed clarity at a time when rural hospitals face persistent challenges.

As the FY26 Labor-HHS-ED bill advances through the appropriations process and into conference negotiations, we respectfully urge that this report language be preserved in any final funding package. While similar language was included in the Senate report, the House version includes a critical provision on the rural pass-through program and directing a Committee briefing, which AAAA would gladly support. Retaining the House provision will be essential to ensuring Congress has the information necessary to consider potential policy solutions that strengthen the anesthesia workforce in rural America.

We appreciate the Committee's leadership on this issue and stand ready to participate constructively in any briefing or follow-up discussions related to anesthesia workforce challenges and patient access in rural communities. Thank you for your continued commitment to these issues and we look forward to engaging further with the Committee.

Sincerely,

The American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA)