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August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The Honorable Jason Smith  
United States House of Representatives  
318 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Smith:

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA), a nonprofit organization of 21,000 members that represents the health interests of rural Americans, supports your legislation, the *Saving Rural Hospitals from Closure Act* (H.R. 7759). Your bill would authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to forgive all Medicare accelerated payments, extend the timeline for repayment, or lower the interest rate of payments for rural hospitals that are experiencing severe financial hardship.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread to over 1000 rural communities at the same time hundreds of rural hospitals, rural health clinics, and small physician practices are on the verge of closure. The loss of revenue over the past few months, due to the inability to provide non-emergency care and patient attrition, has further destabilized the financial viability of hundreds of critical rural health care providers. Prior to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, rural providers were already financially vulnerable, with nearly half of all rural hospitals operating at a financial loss. Now, hundreds of rural providers are facing catastrophic cash shortages, being forced to massively cut staff and services, and potentially preparing for closure.

Your legislation would allow the HHS Secretary to provide hospitals with the flexibility they need to stay open by forgiving hospitals' reimbursements on Medicare accelerated and advanced payments, extending the timeline for their repayment, or lowering the interest rate of their payments if there is "the existence of a serious chance of closure, impending bankruptcy, large-scale layoffs, or any other situation the Secretary determines appropriate." Your bill would also ensure providers are assisted quickly by requiring the Secretary to make a decision within 30 days of receiving a request from a hospital experiencing hardship. NRHA strongly supports the *Saving Rural Hospitals from Closure Act* and commends your efforts to protect rural health by striving to support rural health providers across the country.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Mason Zeagler at 202-639-0550 or by email at [mzeagler@nrharural.org](mailto:mzeagler@nrharural.org). We thank you for sponsoring this important legislation and being stalwart champions for rural America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Morgan', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Alan Morgan  
Chief Executive Officer