

Lawmakers Attempt To Protect Physicians From Medicare Cuts With New Legislation

Lawmakers from both parties attempted to avoid reductions in reimbursement for radiologists and other specialists by introducing new legislation Friday. To cover the difference between 2020 and 2021, they created “Holding Providers Harmless from Medicare Cuts During COVID-19 Act”.

The reps who sponsored the bill have hindsight over the headwinds physicians are currently facing and will face during the pandemic, Reps. Ami Bera, MD, D-Calif., and Larry Bucshon, MD, R-Ind.

Bucshon, a cardiothoracic surgeon who had a private practice before joining Congress, said in a statement, “No doctor should have to worry about large pay cuts while they work to get back on their feet as they continue caring for patients and battling COVID-19 on the front lines”. He called the new proposal “practical, commonsense legislation that will hold doctors harmless and stave off pay cuts as they continue to be the heroes we need during these challenging times.”

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has planned for a while to significantly boost pay for outpatient evaluation and management services. However, that requires about 10% cuts to others who do not bill for such services in order to balance the budget, lawmakers noted.

The American College of Radiology and other physician specialty groups have petitioned hard against these payment reductions over the last few months.

This new legislation was commended on Friday by the ACR.

“We strongly urge Congress to pass the provider and patient protections included in this vital legislation,” Howard Fleishon, MD, chair of the college’s board of chancellors, said in a statement.

Reps. Michael Burgess, MD, R-Texas, and Bobby Rush, D-Ill., created their own solution in October, proposing to waive budget neutrality requirements for one year under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule. Radiology advocates hope this new “hold harmless” proposal from Bucshon and others will gather support in Congress.

“Given the ongoing concerns about the cost and precedent associated with an unrestricted waiver of budget neutrality, the more targeted approach of this bill should help encourage congressional leadership to include the legislation in a year-end legislative package,” Josh Cooper, ACR’s vice president of government relations, economics and health policy, told *Radiology Business* Friday.