

July 6, 2015

House Energy and Commerce Committee  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton, Ranking Member Pallone, and Representative DeGette,

On behalf of the national professional association representing the interests of more than 185,000 occupational therapists, students of occupational therapy, and occupational therapy assistants, American Occupational Therapy Association, I write in support of H.R. 6, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act. AOTA applauds the Committee's efforts to modernize and promote health care innovation by ensuring researchers have the resources they need to find better treatments and cures for many of today's diseases as well as means by which to deliver them effectively.

As health professionals helping enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by promoting health and minimizing the functional effects of illness, injury, and disability, AOTA is pleased that this legislation that seeks to increase funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), provide loan forgiveness for health professionals, enhance data collection on diseases and outcomes, advance the use of telehealth, and improve Medicare's local coverage determinations is moving forward.

AOTA also appreciates the legislation's commitment to cultivating and supporting emerging scientists. AOTA and the American Occupational Therapy Foundation have long supported its emerging scientists, but we know more can be done to incentivize the best and brightest on their road to discovery. With that in mind, AOTA applauds the legislation's efforts to enhance NIH's ability to attract, retain, and develop young scientists.

AOTA strongly supports the legislation's increase in funding for loan repayment programs for researchers at the NIH. These programs ensure that health professionals across NIH are supported, including those performing translational research. Additionally, we commend the legislation's support and recognition of contributions made by veteran leaders in their respective fields through capstone awards.

The legislation's focus on enhancing and expanding the process and infrastructure for tracking the epidemiology of neurological diseases and supports the creation of the National Neurological Diseases Surveillance System would provide needed data. Occupational Therapy plays a key role in treatment of neurological diseases including prevention, detection, management, and treatment. Collecting and providing data on which services patients receive at which stages and the effectiveness of those services is crucial to finding the right approaches and skills needed to best treat such diseases.

AOTA also appreciates the legislation's interest in addressing telehealth in a meaningful way. Telehealth is an important emerging area of healthcare delivery. Occupational therapy

practitioners use telehealth as a service delivery model to help clients develop skills; promote correct use of assistive technology and adaptive techniques; modify home environments; and create health-promoting habits and routines. Medicare, however, does not currently allow for reimbursement of occupational therapy services. Occupational therapy can be provided through telehealth to virtually any client. It can increase accessibility of services to many clients, notably those in remote or underserved areas, prevent unnecessary delays in receiving care, and enhance the ability to monitor and manage the habits and routines of those living with chronic conditions.

Finally, improvements in the Medicare Local Coverage Determinations (LCD) process are also welcome. AOTA has long advocated for changes in this difficult and tedious process, and the increased transparency and opportunity for stakeholder input included in H.R. 6 is an important step forward. Problems with the current LCD process have caused occupational therapy practitioners and AOTA to frequently and successfully challenge determinations. However, some LCDs continue to have inappropriate limitations on coverage. The increased requirements around research-based LCDs will encourage broader use of best contemporary practice.

AOTA thanks the committee for their leadership on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act and efforts to improve and modernize the healthcare system.

Please contact me at [tcasey@aota.org](mailto:tcasey@aota.org), if I can be of future assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Casey', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tim Casey  
Director of Federal Affairs  
American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.