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April 21, 2008

The Honorable Debbie A. Stabenow
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

The American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) wishes to express its strong support for S. 2785, the **Save Medicare Act of 2008**. We applaud your leadership in introducing critical legislation that would protect patients' access to care by preserving the Medicare program and warding off steep pending cuts in physician payment rates that threaten access for our senior and disabled patients.

S. 2785 would replace cuts totaling more than 15% with positive Medicare physician payment updates from July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2009. If not stopped, such draconian cuts will threaten the ability of Medicare patients to receive needed care in the community and may lead to further crowding of our nation's emergency departments. As you may know, recent data from the CDC showed that emergency department (ED) visits have reached an all time high – 115.3 million in 2005 – and that the greatest increase was among those over age 65. AAEM believes it is important to keep the Medicare program strong for America's seniors and disabled so that more of them are not forced to turn to the already crowded EDs for their medical care.

For the long-term sustainability of the nation's health care system, it must be a congressional priority to fix the sustainable growth rate (SGR) used to determine Medicare reimbursements to physicians. AAEM supports a permanent correction to the SGR that links physician payment to the real costs of health care.

The American Academy of Emergency Medicine and its more than 5,000 board certified emergency medicine physicians look forward to the enactment of S. 2785 and offer our resources to bring this legislation to reality. Continued cuts in resources to our health care system are unsustainable. Our citizens will suffer if Medicare continues to cut payments to physicians and other health professionals.

If we can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact Kathleen Ream, AAEM's Director of Government Affairs, at 703-241-3947.

Sincerely yours,

Larry D. Weiss, MD, JD, FAAEM

American Academy of Emergency Medicine

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