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JOINT STATEMENT ON CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS SURPRISE MEDICAL BILLING

California Hospital Association (CHA) President & CEO Carmela Coyle and California Medical Association (CMA) CEO Dustin Corcoran have issued the following joint statement on congressional efforts to address surprise medical billing:

Over the past few days, two new federal proposals to eliminate surprise billing have emerged from different congressional committees. We appreciate Wednesday's announcement by the House Ways and Means Committee of another bipartisan alternative to consider. It shows promise as a more balanced approach. While efforts to address this important issue are welcome, the complexities involved demand thoughtful and thorough debate so lawmakers can fully understand the impact of both proposals, rather than trying to jam legislation through Congress before the end of the year.

"Hospitals and doctors care for people in times of greatest need — the birth of their children, treatment for devastating diseases, critical care after an accident," Coyle said. "It's during these times that patients should be focused on what matters most, not on how much they will be billed for their care. That's why hospitals and doctors stand united in supporting the elimination of surprise medical billing. No patient should ever pay more for emergency care just because their insurance company chooses not to contract with a hospital or a physician."

In particular, CHA and CMA are concerned about the proposed "benchmark rate" for payment included in the Senate HELP/House Energy & Commerce Committee proposal. This proposal threatens access to care for millions of Californians by giving insurers the power to game the system by dropping providers from their networks and make it harder to have on-call specialists available around-the-clock in hospital emergency departments.

"As we have experienced in California, benchmark rates become the de facto rate for all doctors and hospitals, including those who are in-network," Corcoran said. "It gives insurers an excuse to drop contracts with physicians — with the end result being fewer physicians, disruptions in care for patients, and a destabilization of our entire medical care system."

CHA and CMA strongly urge Congress to oppose a benchmark rate as a way of addressing surprise medical billing. Additionally, we call on our lawmakers to give this important issue the time and attention necessary to craft a solution that truly benefits patients, not insurance companies.

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