

The leading education and advocacy
organization for the multidisciplinary cancer team



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December 1, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

CC:

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
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Washington, DC 20510

Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

The Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC) represents 23,000 oncology professionals across the country who care for millions of patients and families fighting cancer. We are committed to providing the highest quality cancer care to our patients, and we believe this will be threatened if the Senate passes the current version of the tax reform proposal. We also have serious concerns about the impact policies included in both the Senate and House versions of the tax bill will have on cancer patients and the providers who serve them if included in the final, conferenced version. We urge policymakers to consider the following when finalizing this legislation:

Repealing the individual mandate

We are very concerned about the impact repealing the individual mandate would have on the insurance market and premiums of cancer patients and survivors. Independent experts estimate that repealing the individual mandate will increase premiums by 10% and leave 13 million more Americans uninsured. The individual mandate is a critical tool to keeping healthy consumers in the marketplace and helps insurers provide consumer protections that are especially critical for cancer patients, including protections for pre-existing conditions, such as cancer. Further, experts predict that the promise of passing certain "market stabilization" bills in conjunction with the tax reform proposal will not be enough to offset the damage from repealing the individual mandate.

Triggering sequestration

As it currently stands, the tax reform bill will increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion, automatically triggering sequestration that will require a \$25 billion annual cut to Medicare. This would be in addition to the 2% sequestration cut currently in effect. As we saw in 2013, sequester cuts have a very real impact on the provision of cancer care – thousands of Medicare patients were turned away as cancer clinics were forced to make tough decisions about serving those patients and trying to stay afloat. We also know that over 60% of cancer cases occur in Medicare beneficiaries, guaranteeing this reduction will impact access to care for elderly cancer patients across the country. We urge Congress to remember these patients when finalizing the tax bill and prevent sequestration from being triggered.

Repealing the medical expense deduction

Cancer is one of the most expensive diseases to treat, often requiring multi-disciplinary care including radiation, surgery and/or costly drug treatment that results in high out-of-pocket costs for patients. Taxpayers taking the medical expense deduction are facing very high medical expenses, are likely suffering from a chronic, expensive disease, like cancer, and need this favorable tax treatment most. Repealing this deduction would only serve to exacerbate the financial toll cancer takes on patients. We urge Congress to retain this deduction.

Taxing graduate tuition benefits

The House version of the tax bill proposes to tax graduate tuition benefits such as waivers or reduced tuition costs for graduate students working in research or as teaching assistants as income, essentially proposing to make graduate education unattainable for many Americans. If this repeal is enacted, experts predict that a significant number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics students will forego graduate education. This policy could also have a detrimental impact on the health care workforce pipeline and health care research. We urge Congress to retain these tax breaks for graduate students to protect clinical research that is critical to future scientific advances in cancer.

Repealing the orphan drug tax credit

The tax proposal includes a provision to repeal the credit for clinical testing expenses for certain drugs for rare diseases or conditions (i.e. the Orphan Drug Tax Credit, or ODTC). Most cancer drugs qualify for orphan status at some point in their lifecycle. We urge Congress to retain this tax credit to encourage innovation and preserve orphan drug research and development.

Impact of increasing the standard deduction on charitable giving

The tax proposal approximately doubles the standard deduction, resulting in millions of taxpayers losing the tax-savings incentive to give to charity, including organizations that support cancer patients and research. We are concerned about this unintended consequence and urge that this policy not be included in the final version of the bill.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge Congress not to finalize these provisions and remember the devastating impact these proposals will have on cancer patients and their families – our patients, and your constituents – nationwide.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Soberman', written in a cursive style.

Mark S. Soberman, MD, MBA, FACS
President
Association of Community Cancer Centers