Sample Letter in Support of CMS-1716-P

(Your letterhead)

Dear **[Member of Congress]:**

On behalf of **[yourself or organization],** I strongly urge the **[state]** Congressional Delegation to support the changes to the wage index included in the FY20 IPPS NPRM, which is critically important to slowing the flood of rural hospital closures occurring nationwide and ensure needed access to care for rural **[state]** and other rural Americans.

Since 2010, 106 rural hospitals have closed, and two more are expected to close within a week of this writing. An additional 673 facilities are vulnerable to closure—this represents more than one-third of rural hospitals in the U.S. As of last year, 46% of rural hospitals were operating at a loss, up from 44% in 2017 and 40% in 2016. Rural hospitals struggle daily to remain solvent following a plethora of payment cuts and policy changes that have led to the current astounding rate of rural hospital closures. Those hospitals with a low wage index face one additional challenge to financial viability.

I strongly support the proposed changes for those hospitals with low wage indexes, hundreds of rural hospitals will receive payments more in line with the economic reality of providing care in rural America. This correction of a long-standing inequity will create greater parity in payments for many financially distraught rural hospitals. The willingness of CMS to reexamine and adjust the wage index is long overdue and appreciated. This strong policy improvement will create greater equity among providers and will significantly help the many struggling rural hospitals.

Rural communities are greatly affected by the maldistribution of healthcare professionals; the majority of Health Professional Shortage Areas are in rural America. However, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that maldistribution was a much larger problem than an absolute shortage of primary care providers. One aspect of this maldistribution is the fact that urban facilities offer better salaries and benefits, plus the additional benefits of greater peer support from a larger workforce. Economic forces would indicate that paying higher, not the lower rates already provided for under the wage index, is the appropriate response to workforce maldistribution. Basic economic principles indicate the rural wage index should exceed that of the urban areas without shortages, instead of a low index based on the cost of living.

The very existence of the wage index is self-perpetuating. A rural community that is provided fewer resources is subsequently unable to afford higher wages. They are forced to only hire those that can and will accept lower wages, while also not filling other positions that if filled would potentially lift their wage index.

Rural America can’t afford to endure these health and economic inequities any longer. Please support CMS proposed rule to increase payments for rural hospitals and fix the wage index.

Sincerely,

**[Your name or organization]**