

(Washington, DC) — After the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee hearing today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) expressed concern that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Acting Administrator Kerry Weems again failed to show that the competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment is adequately accounting for the vital role that small medical equipment suppliers play in providing patient care. Two weeks ago, Congressman Altmire led a letter with Congressman Ron Klein (FL-22) urging the Health Subcommittee to hold a hearing to review CMS's flawed roll-out of the program. Congressman Altmire is also pressing to delay implementation of the first round of competitive bidding, set to begin July 1, by six months so that problems with the program can be addressed.

“Acting Administrator Weems said nothing today to alleviate my concerns about CMS’s competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment. There is still ample evidence that this program is unfairly forcing small medical equipment suppliers out of the marketplace, which could jeopardize patients’ access to the quality care they deserve,” Altmire said. **“Given the numerous problems so far in the roll-out of the first round, I believe that CMS should take a step back and work to resolve these issues.”**

According to the Pennsylvania Association of Medical Suppliers, starting July 1, only 52 medical equipment providers who were awarded a contract by CMS will be able to sell equipment to Medicare patients in the greater Pittsburgh area. There are currently between 480 – 640 small medical equipment suppliers in this region, many of which are small businesses that could be forced to close if they lose their ability to sell to Medicare patients, who often account for a majority of their business.

To improve the competitive bidding program, Congressman Altmire has also co-sponsored the Medicare Durable Medical Equipment Act (H.R. 1845), which would allow all eligible suppliers to provide equipment and services at the competitive bid rate established by CMS, even if they were not originally awarded contracts through competitive bidding. In March, Congressman Altmire also led a letter with 119 co-signers pressing CMS to release its analysis and data on how competitive bidding will affect small businesses.