

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 848

To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, through the Health Care Financing Administration, to expand and strengthen the demonstration project known as the Medicare telemedicine demonstration program.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 5, 1997

Mr. MURKOWSKI (for himself and Mr. BAUCUS) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, through the Health Care Financing Administration, to expand and strengthen the demonstration project known as the Medicare telemedicine demonstration program.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Telemedicine
5 Demonstration Act of 1997”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Access to health care providers is critically
2 important to improving the health of individuals re-
3 siding in rural areas.

4 (2) Individuals residing in the rural areas of the
5 Western United States are severely underserved by
6 both primary and specialty health care providers.

7 (3) Telecommunications technology has made it
8 possible to provide a wide range of vital health care
9 services to individuals residing in remote locations
10 and over vast distances at a fraction of the costs as-
11 sociated with the provision of such services without
12 such technology.

13 (4) On February 17, 1997, the General Ac-
14 counting Office reported that Federal involvement in
15 telehealth systems is needed for the success of such
16 systems.

17 (5) In order for telehealth systems to continue
18 to benefit rural communities, the medicare program
19 under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42
20 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.) must eventually reimburse the
21 provision of health care services to remote locations
22 via telecommunication.

23 (6) The current Medicare telemedicine dem-
24 onstration program conducted by the Secretary of
25 Health and Human Services, through the Health

1 Care Financing Administration, does not include any
2 sites in rural areas of the Western United States.
3 Without such sites, such demonstration program will
4 not provide accurate indicators of the success of tele-
5 medicine.

6 (7)(A) The fragmented nature of Alaska's
7 transportation infrastructure, as well as extremes in
8 geography, climates, and ethnography create severe
9 problems for health care providers to provide health
10 care services to the individuals residing in Alaska.

11 (B) The Alaska Telemedicine Project is a state-
12 wide telehealth project which overcomes infrastruc-
13 ture problems within Alaska by uniting 40 public
14 and private health care providers across Alaska
15 to provide health care services to the residents of
16 Alaska.

17 (8)(A) Health care providers in Montana also
18 experience significant difficulties in providing health
19 care services in rural areas. Five independent tele-
20 medicine networks in Montana have formed the
21 Montana Healthcare Telecommunications Alliance
22 (MHTA), an association of telemedicine service pro-
23 viders representing not-for-profit and public medical
24 and mental health facilities throughout the State.

1 (B) The goal of the MHTA is to promote cost
2 effective statewide deployment of telemedicine serv-
3 ices thereby supporting public and private health
4 care providers and improving access to quality medi-
5 cal and mental health services for all individuals re-
6 siding in Montana.

7 **SEC. 3. EXPANSION OF DEMONSTRATION PROJECT.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, through the
9 Health Care Financing Administration, shall expand the
10 demonstration project known as the Medicare telemedicine
11 demonstration program to include within such demonstra-
12 tion program the Alaska Telemedicine Project (described
13 in section 2(7)) and the Montana Healthcare Tele-
14 communications Alliance (described in section 2(8)).

15 (b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than March
16 1 of each year that the demonstration project described
17 in subsection (a) is being conducted, the Secretary,
18 through the Health Care Financing Administration, shall
19 submit a report to Congress that contains—

20 (1) an evaluation of the effectiveness of such
21 demonstration project; and

22 (2) any legislative recommendations determined
23 appropriate by the Secretary.

24 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
25 authorized to be appropriated \$2,000,000 to the Secretary

- 1 of Health and Human Services to carry out the purposes
- 2 of the demonstration project described in subsection (a).

○