



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MAINE**

## **Muskie School of Public Service**

Institute for Health Policy

P.O. Box 9300, Portland, Maine 04104-9300  
(207) 780-4435, FAX (207) 228-8138, TTY (207) 780-5646  
[www.muskie.usm.maine.edu](http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu)

May 15, 2007

The Honorable Tom Allen  
United States House of Representatives  
1127 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Tom,

I am writing to convey my support for your bill, HR 2184 to continue and expand the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) comparative effectiveness research program. Maine has been in the forefront of research on variations in health care practice patterns, effectiveness, and outcomes. As a former board member of the Maine Medical Assessment Foundation that pioneered much of this research, a faculty member and director of the Muskie School's, Institute for Health Policy, and a member of AHRQ's Health Services Research Peer Review Study Section, I feel strongly that this bill's serious investment in effectiveness research would contribute significantly to our ability to obtain greater value from our healthcare system. I also strongly support the bill's provisions addressing critical issues in the country's current capacity for conducting policy and clinically relevant health services research.

We currently spend over \$2 trillion on healthcare in this country with estimates of as much of 1/3 of this amount wasted on unnecessary or ineffective care. Our current spending on health services research is woefully inadequate to begin to generate better clinical and policy information on the value of health care procedures, services, and technologies. Such information is vital to private and public efforts to redesign our health system to control costs, achieve improved quality, and enhance access.

While I strongly support your bill, I am concerned with the inadequacy of AHRQ funding levels for general health services research and fear that this core mission of the Agency could be dwarfed by its effectiveness portfolio. I would prefer to see some funding emphasis in this bill for this core mission. As I have mentioned, I am currently serving on AHRQ's Health Services Study Section where we review such investigator-initiated research proposals. Since I have been on study section we have seen declines in Agency funding for investigator research leading to a substantial and continuing decline in high quality health services research proposals.

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Our country's best health services researchers are giving up on the Agency as a source of funding for their work. Investigator initiated research has led to many of the most important innovations in health services in the last 30 years, including the development of new payment and quality measurement systems. We need to continue to innovate if we are to address the serious cost, quality and access problems that we face.

Please let me know if I can be helpful as you move forward with this bill. I appreciate your continuing health policy leadership on behalf of the State of Maine.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew F. Coburn', written in a cursive style.

Andrew F. Coburn, Ph.D, Professor and  
Director, Institute for Health Policy