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Senator Ben Hansen
Nebraska Health and Human Services Committee Chair
Room #1510
P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509

Thank you, Chairman Hansen and Members Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Jessica Thoene. I'm a speech-language pathologist and the owner of Alpha Rehabilitation in Kearney, Nebraska. I also serve as the Legislative Committee Co-Chair for the Nebraska Speech-Language-Hearing Association and am testifying on behalf of our members. We greatly appreciate Senator Walz' willingness to introduce LB 430 addressing our concerns of applying a multiple-procedure payment-reduction policy (MPPR) to therapy services.

Speech language pathologists are also impacted by MPPR. A scenario that may cause a reduction in payment with MPPR being applied to speech language pathology billing is to codes billed for different services performed on the same day by the speech language pathologist. CPT code 92507 (Treatment of speech, language, voice, communication, and/or auditory processing disorder) when billed on the same day as 92526 (Treatment of swallowing dysfunction and/or oral function for feeding) will be subject to a 50% reduction in one of those codes billed. These services are distinct services that require different supplies and delivery models and should not be reduced as no duplication of expense is shared. Cost saving was already accounted for when codes were introduced.

In Nebraska we are facing shortages with speech language pathologists and patient care is impacted. I have experienced this firsthand with not being able to provide coverage for rural hospitals and nursing homes due to short staffing leaving patients with no resources. Inflation has increased all our expenses to deliver services. Speech pathologists can allow patients to regain swallowing ability, eliminate the need for feeding tubes, treat aspiration pneumonia and prevent costly hospital stays. Our services restore or give the ability to patients to communicate to be productive in the workforce.

MPPR is a per-day policy that applies across disciplines and across settings. Another example, if a speech language pathologist and a physical therapist both provide treatment to the same patient on the same day, the MPPR applies to all codes billed that day, regardless of discipline. Under MPPR, full payment is made for the therapy service or unit with the highest practice expense value and payment reductions will apply for any other unit of therapy performed on the same day. For the additional procedures provided on the same day, the practice expense of each fee will be reduced by 50%. Practices are now making patients come on different days to complete their various therapies in order to not be subject to MPPR. This is a burden on the patient and increases the odds that they are not going to receive therapy needed. In rural Nebraska it creates larger problems as travel to medical facilities at times is a much

greater distance and time commitment. Not participating in recommended therapy plans can result in higher medical bills.

We are concerned this practice will encourage delayed therapy or multiple visit requirements for patients, causing potential further setbacks at a critical time of rehabilitation. Again, providing services below cost may lead to a reduction in services and providers available in rural and geographically remote areas, where multiple trips are more challenging and staffing shortages are at an all-time high.

The current MPPR model isn't sustainable for providers and puts Nebraskans at risk of not receiving the speech therapy services they need in order to communicate, in some cases be able to swallow, and be able to live independently. I have attached a letter from the American Speech Language Hearing Association to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska. Our discussions with that private plan were unsuccessful in gaining understanding of the issues caused by MPPR.

The Nebraska Speech-Language-Hearing Association respectfully requests the Committee advance LB 430.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.