



For Immediate Release  
June 15, 2007

Contact: Carol Guthrie  
(202) 224-4515

## **BAUCUS QUESTIONS STANDARDS OF SAFETY, CARE AT CALIFORNIA HOSPITAL**

*Senator holds CMS accountable after substandard care results in patient death*

*Washington, DC* – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today requested to know how the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) plans to ensure the safety of patients at the Martin Luther King Jr.-Harbor Hospital in Los Angeles, California, which has been cited for providing poor care, and news reports indicate at least one patient death at the facility may have been due to neglect. In a letter to CMS Acting Administrator Leslie Norwalk, Baucus questioned how the agency will ensure adequate care and safety, and compliance with Medicare Conditions of Participation at the hospital.

**“The horrific stories coming out of this facility are appalling and wholly unacceptable to me,”** said Baucus. **“No matter who they are or where they live, Medicare and Medicaid patients—and all patients—should have access to safe and effective health care. I will not stand for Medicaid and Medicare dollars being spent on substandard care.”**

The public facility, which serves many low-income communities, has been sanctioned by both state and local health officials in recent weeks. Baucus is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Medicare and Medicaid programs. The text of the letter follows here.

June 15, 2007

### **Via Electronic Transmission**

Leslie V. Norwalk, Esq.  
Acting Administrator  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Acting Administrator Norwalk:

The United States Senate Committee on Finance (Committee) has exclusive jurisdiction over the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Accordingly, it has a responsibility to the more than 80 million Americans who receive health care through these programs to ensure that they receive the highest quality of care from safe and trusted providers. As Chairman of the Committee, I take that responsibility very seriously.

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I am writing to you in response to the media coverage of events at Martin Luther King, Jr.-Harbor Hospital in Los Angeles, California. The press reports about the unfortunate death of Edith Rodriguez are disturbing. There have been many prior deaths and long-standing problems; and local and state attempts to improve the hospital have failed. CMS has taken significant measures and allocated federal resources to help correct the standard of care at King-Harbor Hospital to no avail. After a failed federal inspection, CMS withdrew \$200 million in funding for the hospital.

I would like to know what additional actions your agency is taking or plans to take to ensure that King-Harbor Hospital provides the appropriate level of care in a safe setting, including ensuring its compliance with the Medicare Conditions of Participation.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this request. Please arrange a briefing on the situation and your efforts for my Committee staff no later than June 29, 2007. Should you have any questions, please contact Neleen Eisinger of my Committee Staff at (202) 224-4515 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus  
Chairman

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