

For Immediate Release

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## **SENATORS INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO HELP ORGAN TRANSPLANT PATIENTS**

[WASHINGTON, DC] – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) introduced bipartisan legislation to improve the quality of life for people with kidney disease. The *Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act* would assist thousands of Americans under the age of 65 who are being cut off from Medicare after 36 months by extending coverage of immunosuppressive drugs for kidney transplant recipients.

According to United Network for Organ Sharing, approximately 25,000 organ transplants were performed last year in the United States. The vast majority of transplants – over 15,150 Americans in 2012 – are provided to patients in need of a kidney because they are living with end stage renal disease (ESRD) or kidney failure. However, for thousands of working Americans who have not yet reached 65 and are not disabled, treatment coverage is cut off after 36 months regardless of their ability to pay for lifesaving therapy that can run more than \$1,000 a month.

**“Of the 100,000 patients waiting for an kidney transplant, those patients lucky enough to undergo a successful transplant should not have to worry about being able to pay for the medication that will reduce the risk of organ rejection,” said Durbin. “In 2000, Congress passed legislation that provided older or disabled individuals lifetime coverage for immunosuppressive drugs through Medicare. Today’s legislation will extend that coverage to all patients trying to live healthy lives after kidney transplants.”**

**“This legislation offers practical changes to this Medicare program and the potential for savings in the long run,” Cochran said. “Our intent is to help provide the immunosuppressive drugs needed to make kidney transplants more successful and to avoid the need for more costly, long-term dialysis treatments. For states like Mississippi with a high incidence of diabetes and related kidney failures, extending this coverage could mean improved health and quality of life for many people.”**

The effects of the disparity in coverage are evidenced in the hypothetical case of a young woman. For example, a 26 year old woman living with ESRD would have lifelong dialysis covered by Medicare at \$77,500/year. Medicare would cover the cost of a transplant at \$110,000/transplant. The immunosuppressive drugs she would need to ensure the organ is not rejected by her body are only covered for 36 months and the drugs are far less costly than dialysis at \$10,000 to \$20,000/year. Without immunosuppressive drugs to keep kidney transplants from being rejected, many patients find themselves right back where they started: in

need of a kidney. This circular cycle of care is costing taxpayers a lot of money and putting thousands of lives at risk.

**“ASN thanks Senators Durbin and Cochran for introducing this bill. It’s good for patients and it’s cost-efficient. This is a commonsense piece of legislation that, when passed, will help countless kidney transplant recipients,” said Rachel Nell Shaffer, American Society of Nephrology Manager of Policy and Government Affairs.**

**“On behalf of the largest organization representing the majority of medical professionals engaged in the field of solid organ transplantation, I once again applaud Senators Durbin and Cochran for their steadfast support and leadership on behalf of transplant donors and recipients across the country. Today's re-introduction of the Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act provides a common-sense approach and major step forward for the more than 100,000 individuals currently awaiting a lifesaving donor organ. The transplant community and national stakeholder organizations representing kidney transplant recipients, candidates for transplant, and professionals engaged in organ donation and transplantation, strongly urge swift passage of this important legislation to eliminate the current arbitrary 36-month limit on immunosuppressive drug coverage imposed on Medicare end stage renal disease (ESRD) beneficiaries. Once again, AST applauds the commitment and leadership by Senators Durbin and Cochran to strengthen and enhance our nation's organ transplant system,” said Dr. Roz Mannon, American Society of Transplantation President.**