



AMERICAN BENEFITS

COUNCIL

March 23, 2004

The Honorable Judd Gregg
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing in support of S. 720, the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act, which I understand the Senate may soon consider.

The American Benefits Council represents primarily large employers and other organizations that either sponsor or administer health and retirement benefits covering more than 100 million Americans. As major purchasers of health care services, our members have a strong interest in S. 720 which we believe will help reduce preventable medical errors and promote quality improvement in our health care system.

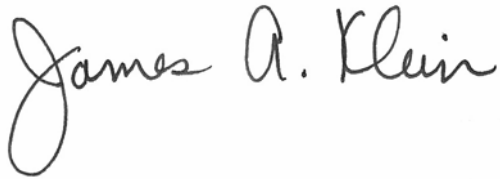
The Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act would encourage voluntary reporting by health care providers of medical errors, adverse medical events and "near misses" to patient safety organizations. Through the analysis of this information, patient safety organizations would develop practical solutions to recurring problems in the health care system to help promote better health outcomes for patients and greater consensus on best practices. Information available to patient safety organizations would be given strong confidentiality protections -- including safeguards from inappropriate use in lawsuits -- in order to encourage voluntary reporting of often sensitive information.

We also support strongly the provisions of S. 720 which make clear the bill would not preempt or limit separate public or private efforts to obtain the same or similar information on adverse medical events and medical errors from health care providers. Increasing numbers of employers are beginning to offer employees different forms of consumer-directed health plans which are all intended to encourage employees to make better informed decisions about the cost and quality of the health care services they use. While patient safety data

may be one of many sources of information employees may consider in making health care choices, expanding its use by individual consumers is a promising strategy designed to put market forces to work in driving significant improvements in our health system and more accountability for better performance.

When the Institute of Medicine issued its landmark report in 1999, To Err is Human, and projected that as many as 98,000 Americans may die each year from health care mistakes, it challenged us all to take corrective action. We believe the Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act responds directly to the Institute's challenge for Congress to act to reduce medical errors, continuously advance health care quality, and save lives. We therefore urge the approval of S. 720 by the Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James A. Klein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

James A. Klein
President