

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Mehmet Oz
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Administrator Oz:

As members of the congressional delegations from Alaska, Montana, and Washington, we write to express our strong support for the recertification of LifeCenter Northwest, our region's primary organ procurement organization (OPO). LifeCenter Northwest plays a vital role in sustaining organ donation and transplantation across a uniquely large and complex donation service area. We are deeply concerned that their decertification would create unnecessary risk for our region – jeopardizing timely access to organ transplants and undermining support for donor families.

LifeCenter Northwest is the federally designated OPO for a non-contiguous service area spanning three time zones and covering all of Alaska and Montana, most of Washington, and 11 counties in northern Idaho. The organization serves more than 10 million people across approximately 808,000 square miles and coordinates donation services for more than 200 hospitals. Despite serving this expansive region and large population, there are only five transplant centers in the entire service area, all located in Washington state. As a result, organs frequently must be transported over long distances within narrow clinical timeframes, often relying on air transport across a geographically dispersed region.

Despite these challenges, LifeCenter Northwest is an effective, high-performing organization with a demonstrated commitment to sustained and measurable improvement. Over the past decade, LifeCenter Northwest increased organ donation by approximately 120%, outpacing the national rate of just over 80%. This momentum has continued over the last five years. From 2020 to 2024 alone, LifeCenter Northwest grew the number of organ donors by 47% and organ transplants by 32%, exceeding national growth rates of 35% and 24% respectively.

We support performance evaluation frameworks grounded in sound, evidence-based measures. However, we are concerned that CMS's current OPO evaluation methodology does not adequately account for the unique circumstances and operational challenges inherent in serving a large, rural, geographically dispersed service area, like our region. These structural challenges include limited availability and proximity of transplant centers, variation in acceptance practices for medically complex organs, and unique transportation logistics. Unlike many CMS quality frameworks, the current methodology relies heavily on two closely related outcome measures, provides limited risk adjustment for differences in OPO circumstances, and does not recognize

sustained year-over-year improvement. As result, effective OPOs, like LifeCenter Northwest, may be inaccurately assessed despite strong overall performance.

With this in mind, we urge CMS and HHS to prioritize stability for patients waiting for lifesaving transplants, support continuous system-wide improvement, and ensure OPO oversight is fair, accurate, comprehensive, and grounded in reliable data.

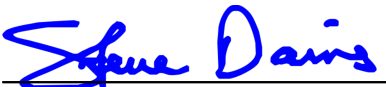
Accordingly, we respectfully request that HHS and CMS:

- Consider the regional and operational circumstances beyond LifeCenter Northwest's control, including the availability and proximity of transplant centers, variation in acceptance practices for medically complex organs, transportation and logistical challenges, and the unique demands of serving remote and geographically dispersed communities.
- Refrain from automatic decertification based solely on the current outcome-only, single-year tiering methodology.
- Provide LifeCenter Northwest with a clear pathway to demonstrate sustained, measurable improvement over time before taking any certification action that would disrupt the donation service area.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Members of the Alaska, Montana, and Washington Congressional Delegations



Steve Daines
United States Senator



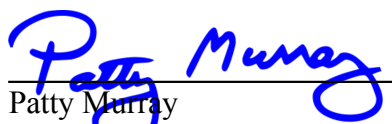
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



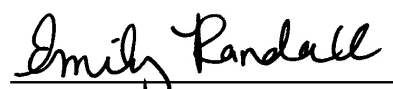
Tim Sheehy
United States Senator



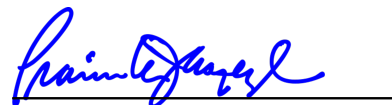
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



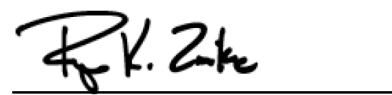
Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Ryan K. Zinke
Member of Congress



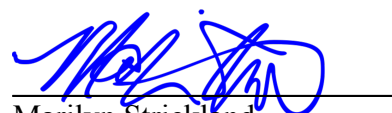
Michael Baumgartner
Member of Congress



Troy Downing
Member of Congress



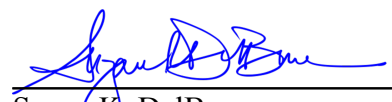
Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress