May 18, 2017

The Honorable Al Franken
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Franken:

The American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the world’s largest association of neurologists representing 32,000 professionals, is strongly committed to improving the care and outcomes of persons with neurologic illness in a cost-effective manner. We would like to express our strong support for the Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act.

One in six people live with a brain or nervous system condition, including Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, stroke, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, ALS, multiple sclerosis, and headache. The annual cost of treating these disorders in the US is more than $500 billion, and prescription drugs for neurologic conditions are increasingly expensive. Neurologists seek to provide high-value care for their patients at the lowest cost possible, but high drug prices make it challenging to deliver care that is accessible and affordable for patients with complex neurologic conditions.

The AAN applauds your efforts to address the rising cost of prescription medications and the impact they have on patients, physicians, and the health care system. Specifically, we strongly support provisions of your legislation that promote transparency in the way drugs are priced. Unsustainable drug prices have affected both well-established and new revolutionary neurology treatments. For example, an existing drug for Duchenne muscular dystrophy previously priced at $1,200 was recently purchased by a different company and reintroduced to market at a price of $89,000. New therapies—like the only medication for the neurologic disease spinal muscular atrophy—cost an astounding $750,000 for the first year of treatment and more than $300,000 for each subsequent year. These prices are difficult to understand without the type of transparency proposed in your legislation.

We also appreciate your attention to the issues of access and affordability. We support provisions that would allow the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to negotiate drug prices, and we are particularly interested in your proposal to use the price paid by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) when negotiations between drug companies and HHS fail. Our members working in VA facilities are able to provide significant prescription savings to their patients, and at a minimum, this value should be extended to the entire health care system. Additionally, the AAN supports the reimportation of safe, qualifying medications from Canada as well as efforts to reduce price gouging.

Many neurologic conditions do not yet have viable, affordable medications available.
The Act’s provisions on choice and competition are especially important as physicians and researchers work to bring new drugs to market at accessible prices. We support efforts to increase access to affordable generic drugs and to deter product hopping. The AAN also appreciates language that eliminates tax breaks for companies that engage in direct-to-consumer advertising. Many of these sentiments are included in our recent Prescription Drug Prices Position Statement, which was driven by member concerns about drug prices and the impact on their patients and practices.

Thank you for taking a leadership role on this critical issue. Please contact Amber Stock at astock@aan.com if you have questions or request additional information.