

UPDATED RELEASE: ASTS-Led Immuno Legislation Signed into Law

Transplant surgeons welcome the exciting news that the immunosuppressant drug coverage bill was signed into law this week. ASTS was very proud to see that Congress included the text of the House-passed Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act (Immuno Bill) – H.R. 5534 – as part of the last COVID relief package in 2020 and it is now the law of the land.

Simply stated, [the legislation](#) changes Medicare’s current policy to address the 36-month limitation on coverage of immunosuppressive medications for Medicare transplant recipients. Immunosuppressive medications are necessary for the lifespan of the kidney to maintain and preserve its life-sustaining transplant function, to honor and protect the “gift of life” given by donors and donor families, and to protect taxpayer dollars expended for the transplanted kidney.

The bill, initiated more than a decade ago, has been a longstanding, high priority for ASTS, demonstrated in our advocacy efforts, work with allies in the transplant community, and active engagement on Capitol Hill. Without the strong voices of our allies in the patient community, most notably our friends at the American Association of Kidney Patients and the National Kidney Foundation, today’s success would not have been possible.

ASTS President Marwan S. Abouljoud, MD, CPE, MMM, said, “After years of multi-layered efforts with our allies and congressional champions, Congress fixed a longstanding gap in transplant care.” He added, “This bill never had any opposition. It began with recognition this was the right thing to do to support patients and extend longevity and transplant survival. The end result is smart policy that preserves the precious gift of organs with covered medicines for those who need it most, the uninsured and those facing disparities in receipt of coverage.”

We enthusiastically applaud our congressional bill champions, Congressmen Michael Burgess, MD, (R-TX) and Ron Kind (D-WI) and Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) and their staff for working with us for many years to realize this incredible accomplishment that will mean so much for transplant patients and their families. We also appreciate the work of the Department of Health and Human Services, which took the necessary steps to evidence we can indeed protect the needs of Medicare transplant patients while also bringing cost savings to our nation’s taxpayers.

The legislation will establish eligibility for immunosuppressive drug coverage through Medicare to post-kidney transplant individuals whose entitlement to benefits under part A ends and who do not receive coverage of immunosuppressive drugs through other insurance.

ASTS Legislative and Regulatory Committee Chairman Anil Paramesh, MD, said, “There have been a few red-letter days in the history of transplant. This is one of those days. Today, our government has removed one of the biggest barriers to long-term success in transplant.” He added, “It took perseverance, patience, and collaboration with many stakeholders to get here. And what a year for this to happen – our patients are routinely some of the most vulnerable. COVID-19 made that dynamic so

much more challenging. Today, we applaud the wisdom of Congress to get this done when we need it the most.”