



October 18, 2018

The Honorable Tom Reed  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Terri Sewell  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Reed and Sewell:

On behalf of the 131,400 members of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), I am writing to register AAFP support for the *Diabetic Vision Loss and Blindness Prevention Act of 2018* (HR 6639) and to commend Congressional efforts to advance a bipartisan bill to encourage the early diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy affects blood vessels in the light-sensitive tissue called the retina that lines the back of the eye. It is the most common cause of vision loss among people with diabetes and the leading cause of vision impairment and blindness among working-age adults. Vision loss affects 37 million Americans older than 50 years and one in four who are older than 80 years. Vision loss is common and consequential among older adults, who too often experience the world darkening around them. A large proportion of vision loss can be delayed or prevented, especially vision loss associated with diabetes. The percentage of Americans age 65 and older with diabetes remains high, at 25.2%, or 12 million seniors who have both diagnosed and undiagnosed forms of the disease.

Family physicians play a critical role in identifying patients who may contract or already have diabetes as well as those that are at risk of vision impairment. While mass screening for diabetic retinopathy is not recommended by the AAFP, HR 6639 would take the sensible step of providing Medicare coverage and defined payment for annual digital retinal imaging with remote interpretation if a patient and family physician decide screening is warranted.

We appreciate the opportunity to register AAFP support for this legislation. Please contact Robert Hall, Director of Government Relations, at 202-232-9033 or [rhall@aafp.org](mailto:rhall@aafp.org) with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Munger, MD, FAAFP  
Board Chair

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### **About Family Medicine**

Family physicians conduct approximately one in five of the total medical office visits in the United States per year—more than any other specialty. Family physicians provide comprehensive, evidence-based, and cost-effective care dedicated to improving the health of patients, families, and communities. Family medicine's cornerstone is an ongoing and personal patient-physician relationship where the family physician serves as the hub of each patient's integrated care team. More Americans depend on family physicians than on any other medical specialty.