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Congressman Kissell Introduces Bill Requiring Fair Treatment of Lymphedema Patients

WASHINGTON – Congressman Larry Kissell (NC-08) has introduced legislation which would require Medicare to offer fair treatment coverage for Americans afflicted with primary and secondary lymphedema.

The Lymphedema Diagnosis and Treatment Cost Saving Act of 2010, HR 4662, is designed to improve patient care and reduce costs associated with complications related to lymphedema. Lymphedema, also known as lymphatic obstruction, is a condition of localized fluid retention and tissue swelling caused by a compromised lymphatic system.

Kissell introduced the legislation after meeting with constituent Heather Ferguson, whose son Dylan, suffers from primary lymphedema. Ferguson, who lives in Charlotte, has been active in working to raise awareness of the disease and to help alleviate the troubles lymphedema sufferers have getting insurance to cover treatment.

"I was moved by Heather's story, and all she has gone through to ensure that her son receives this important treatment. Her dedication to helping others in the same situation has inspired me to help her in her quest to make sure lymphedema patients have an opportunity to receive treatment," Kissell said. "This preventative treatment will help improve life for many people throughout this country."

Ferguson has worked with North Carolina Representative Tricia Cotham to get legislation through the North Carolina General Assembly to help patients in the state. But Ferguson wanted to help all patients suffering from lymphedema. She contacted Kissell, whom she'd met before he was elected, and asked him to help her bring the fight national.

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"When my insurance company agreed to cover my son's treatment for a year, I was shocked and so discouraged. I asked if they would offer this opportunity to other policy holders and they said no. I realized that I would be fighting with insurance companies to ensure Dylan could receive treatment for my entire life and then, for Dylan's entire life. It wasn't enough to get our insurance company to cover it, I wanted to fix the problem," Ferguson said. "I am so lucky that my own representatives, both state and national, have been so responsive to my efforts. I never expected this to happen so quickly, and am so thankful to Congressman Kissell for his quick response to this. It has renewed my faith in the political system to know that my representatives are there to listen to their constituents."

The treatment for lymphedema is known as complex decongestive therapy. The treatment is used world-wide, is not experimental, and has been used for decades with proven success. Not all components of the treatment fall under the categories for which Medicare typically provide coverage. With treatment, patients can live long, healthy and virtually normal lives. However, without treatment, the disease can progressively worsen, causing severe disfigurement, disability, pain and in some cases, even death.

Photo attached: Heather Ferguson and her son Dylan.