



MARIA CANTWELL
UNITED STATES SENATOR FOR WASHINGTON

Dear Mrs. Rankin,

In response to my inquiry on your behalf, I have been in contact with and received the following information from the U.S. Department of Labor:

Ms. Michelle Rankin submitted a request through Senator Cantwell, concerning massage therapy authorization under the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA).

We have carefully considered the concerns expressed in the letter and reviewed several related cases. Over the last year our office observed an unusually large increase in massage therapy authorization requests. Between January 1, 2025, and March 31, 2025, the Division of Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation (DEEOIC) received 251 requests, between April 1, 2025, and June 30, 2025, that number doubled to 509. To address this, for a short period of time (from July 14, 2025, to August 11, 2025), the Medical Benefits Adjudication Unit (MBAU) sent a list of these requests to OWCP's Medical Officer. During this review period, 152 massage therapy authorization requests were referred to the Medical Officer. While the Medical Officer recommended approval of some of these because they contained sufficient medical evidence that aligned both the accepted condition(s) and accepted industry standard of care; in many cases, she recommended denial. This process was not intended as a long-term solution, but rather a temporary referral process to address the large influx of requests.

Upon review of the cases that were denied, some lacked complete documentation (such as missing letters of medical necessity, or treatment orders for non-accepted conditions). However, we also note that in many cases, the DEEOIC staff did not follow its normal procedures for referral to a Contract Medical Consultant (CMC) prior to denial. In addition, staff should have taken specific note of the statutory provision that treatment modalities can include those that give relief (rather than simply cure) of the symptoms related to an accepted condition. As such, the DEEOIC will conduct a thorough analysis of all denials issued during this period to ensure the appropriate adjudicatory standards were applied in evaluating each case—specifically, whether the prescribed therapy was reasonably expected to cure, give relief, or reduce the degree or period of the accepted medical condition(s). If appropriate, some denied cases will be reopened for further review and development.

In addition, the Federal EEOICPA Procedure Manual update will be released soon. It clarifies the role of the Medical Officer, making it clear that referrals can be made as a development option for complex medical issues, deviations from accepted medical standards, the need to ensure any recommended treatment is in alignment with program regulations and guidelines, or cases designated as terminal where timely analysis is critical. These referrals are intended to support—not replace—the MBE adjudicatory process, providing additional medical oversight in limited circumstances involving heightened complexity or ambiguity of medical justification.

DEEOIC remains committed to applying consistent, evidence-based standards while ensuring fair and individualized review of all therapy requests in compliance with established policies and procedures. Thank you for bringing these issues forward and for your advocacy on behalf of the claimant population.

I hope you find the response from U.S. Department of Labor to be helpful.

I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention and giving me the opportunity to assist you in resolving this issue. Please feel free to contact my office in the future should you need assistance with another matter involving the federal government.

Sincerely,
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator