

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 15, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your bipartisan efforts to ensure our nation's health care providers have the resources they need to effectively prepare for and respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As both chambers work on additional legislation to address this public health crisis before the close of the 116th Congress, we write to urge you to prioritize both a long-term reauthorization and additional infrastructure funding for Community Health Centers.

The passage of the Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, extended funding for community health centers (CHCs), the National Health Service Corps, teaching health centers that operate GME programs (THCGME), and the Special Diabetes Programs at current funding levels through December 18, 2020. Additionally, the CARES Act included \$1.3 billion in supplemental funding for health centers for Fiscal Year 2020. However, the Continuing Resolution did not provide additional emergency funds for public health agencies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic or other COVID-related relief or policies. The COVID-19 public health crisis has had a devastating impact on CHCs, and it is more important than ever that Congress ensure stability by securing long-term funding for health centers.

CHCs are operating on razor-thin margins that, for most, have been stretched to the proverbial breaking point due to Coronavirus response efforts and lost revenues, as well as multiple attacks to 340B prescription drug discount funding, resulting in a major reduction in patient visits and loss of revenue. As such, the pandemic has had a dramatic economic impact on our health

centers, many of which have been forced to implement safeguarding measures to ensure the long-term financial stability of their organization. This includes some having made difficult personnel decisions, including temporary reductions in staffing and closures of important healthcare delivery sites during this crisis, in fact 651 health centers across the nation are currently closed due to this pandemic.

Given health center's 50-plus years of dedicated service and vital role in protecting our nation's most vulnerable populations, both in rural and urban areas, more must be done to ensure their long-term financial viability. Ensuring long-term, robust health center funding is essential to health centers' ability to recruit and hire providers, expand capacity and plan for dramatic increases in demand for services, particularly as this crisis evolves. We urge you to consider legislation reauthorizing CHCs for four years to provide crucial long-term, sustainable funding and stability to the almost 30 million low and lower-income patients treated at our health centers.

It is also critical that future legislation takes into account the urgent infrastructure needs of CHCs. Now more than ever, infrastructure funding is essential to both support ongoing projects to address unmet primary care needs that have been suspended due to COVID-19, as well as supporting the implementation of various new infrastructure needs to provide ongoing and necessary care during the pandemic. This includes rapidly adopted and expanded remote telemedicine and video medicine capabilities for patients to access the services they need while mitigating the spread of the coronavirus – as well as urgent “emergency” facility alteration projects undertaken to shield crucial frontline staff while continuing to deliver critically needed testing, treatment, and every-day comprehensive preventive health care services.

As the government funding deadline of December 18, 2020 rapidly approaches for CHCs, we urge you to continue our commitment protecting and expanding health care for American families, ensuring the long-term stability needed for CHCs to deal with this crisis, and supporting CHCs to meet current patient care needs as well as address any future surges in patient need related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator