

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write today to request that you provide funds from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) specifically for community health centers (CHCs) in the next funding tranche so that they can continue to provide high-quality care to Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak.

As the safety-net for the U.S. health care system, CHCs provide care for our nation's most medically vulnerable individuals. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, CHCs, like other providers across the country, have experienced a precipitous drop in net revenue. This loss is due to many factors, including dramatic drops in regular in-person visits, declines in capacity as growing numbers of CHC workers are furloughed or sidelined due to exposure to or infection with COVID-19, and expenses related to providing COVID-19 care – this includes acquiring personal protective equipment (PPE), additional cleaning and other protective measures and efforts to set up testing capacity. Based on recent data from the National Association of Community Health Centers, weekly visits are down by nearly 50%, 12% of staff are unable to report to work due to COVID-19 and over 1,800 CHC sites have temporarily closed.

It is critical that CHCs can continue to serve their communities in the weeks and months ahead to help keep at-risk patients safe and lessen the demand on other providers such as hospitals. As primary providers for many of our nation's most medically and economically vulnerable individuals, CHCs guarantee access to care regardless of one's ability to pay, ensuring individuals do not show up at emergency rooms unless it is warranted. Further, we expect that in the coming months the demands on the health care safety-net will be significantly higher than they were before given the current economic downturn. It is critical that CHCs are on solid financial footing in order to meet this surge in demand.

While Congress has appropriated \$2 billion to assist CHCs with the costs associated with COVID-19 – including \$600 million for testing efforts – this amount only goes so far in covering the losses they are incurring. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) states that funds from PHSSEF are to be allocated to health care providers throughout the country, CHCs included. Therefore, we request that HHS prioritize funding specific to CHCs in any forthcoming release of funds from the PHSSEF so that these essential providers can continue to serve their communities during this time and in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Eliot L. Engel

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

Jackie Walorski

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Member of Congress

Diana DeGette

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Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick

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Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
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José E. Serrano
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Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Katie Porter
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