

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

December 3, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy,

I write to urge you to prioritize the long-term funding and full reauthorization of Community Health Centers (CHCs) and related public health programs. It is essential that CHCs and supporting programs, such as the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program, receive robust and long-term funding before the December 20, 2019 deadline to ensure that these vital services are fully available for the vulnerable and underserved communities that depend on them.

Community Health Centers, or CHCs, provide affordable primary and preventative health care to the most vulnerable and underserved communities. Over 29 million individuals, including over 385,000 veterans and almost 9 million children, receive quality medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health care services from a CHC. CHCs employ more than 236,000 people across the country, produce nearly \$55 billion in economic activity, and save our health care system more than \$24 billion per year. CHCs also help people access healthy food, safe housing, and affordable transportation. In the midst of the addiction epidemic, CHCs are well-positioned providers of substance use disorder and mental health treatment in communities. Services provided by CHCs help patients avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency room and reduce health disparities in our communities<sup>1</sup>.

In New York, health centers provide high quality, comprehensive, and low-cost primary and preventative care services sites to more than 2.4 million New Yorkers. Community Health Centers are important to New York's economic stability, which in 2017 generated nearly \$5 billion for our

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<sup>1</sup> "America's Health Centers." Published by National Association of Community Health Centers. August 2019. Available online at: <http://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Americas-Health-Centers-Final-8.5.19.pdf>

economy and created 35,000 full-time and part-time jobs<sup>2</sup>. CHCs are ready and able to respond to the changing, pressing needs of the communities they serve and are the backbone of America's health care safety net.

On December 20, 2019, in line with the Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the federal government funded, funding for the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF), which makes up over 70% of federal grant funding for health centers, will expire without Congressional action. While a short-term extension removes the immediate threat of disruption for CHCs, centers across the country are already reporting indirect impacts from the threat of a lapse in funding for the CHCF. Even with another extension for these programs, the uncertainty around funding continues to pose major challenges. If the CHCF is not reauthorized altogether, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) predicts that this 70% reduction in federal funding could result in nearly 9 million patients losing access to primary and preventive care, roughly 47,000 providers and staff losing their jobs, and approximately 2,400 sites closing. Health centers in New York State could stand to lose more than \$185 million and nearly 400,000 patients could lose access to care. New York State could lose up to \$900 million in economic activity without reauthorization of the CHCF<sup>3</sup>. We cannot allow the CHCF to expire and cause such a massive disruption to one of the nation's most important health safety nets.

Also expiring on the same deadline of December 20, 2019, are the National Health Service Corps, or NHSC, and the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education, or THCGME, programs that provide essential workforce support for CHCs<sup>4</sup>. The expiration of the NHSC and the THCGME would harm the ability of health centers to meet growing workforce needs and service demand at CHCs nationally. The NHSC places thousands of medical professionals in underserved urban and rural areas through scholarships and loan repayment programs that allow clinicians to provide care to over 11 million patients annually<sup>5</sup>. Under the THCGME, over 50 Teaching Health Centers support more than 700 medical residents in training to provide health services to an estimated one million patients annually in underserved urban and rural areas. Due to programs like these, over 80% of residents in training in a teaching health center did so in a medically underserved or rural community<sup>6</sup>. In New York, the NHSC supports 184 clinicians working in 48 health centers across

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<sup>2</sup> "New York Health Center Fact Sheet." Published by National Association of Community Health Centers. January 2019. Available online at: [http://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NY\\_19.pdf](http://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NY_19.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "The Health Center Funding Cliff and Its Impact." Published by the National Association of Community Health Centers. September 2017. Available online at: [https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/nachc/pages/297/attachments/original/1506523575/The\\_Health\\_Center\\_Funding\\_Cliff\\_and\\_Its\\_Impact\\_September\\_2017.pdf?1506523575](https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/nachc/pages/297/attachments/original/1506523575/The_Health_Center_Funding_Cliff_and_Its_Impact_September_2017.pdf?1506523575)

<sup>4</sup> "Community Health Centers Undergo 'Chaos and Confusion' Without Long-Term Funding." Published by Yusra Morad. November 2019. Available online at: <https://morningconsult.com/2019/11/21/community-health-centers-undergo-chaos-confusion-without-long-term-funding/>

<sup>5</sup> "Recruiting, Training, and Retaining the Best." Published by National Association of Community Health Centers. March 2019. Available online at: <http://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NACHC-2019-Workforce-Policy-Paper.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education Program Factsheet." Published by National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. Academic Year 2017-2018. Available online at: <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/health-workforce-analysis/program-highlights/2018/teaching-health-center-graduate-medical-education-program-2018.pdf>

the state, and the state receives more than \$7 million in THCGME funding to train providers in medically underserved areas<sup>7</sup>.

As New York State faces a potentially \$4 billion Medicaid funding shortfall this year<sup>8</sup>, CHCs and their partners cannot afford more uncertainty and more potential cuts. That is why I am calling on Congress to extend, raise, and reauthorize funding for CHCs in accordance with *S. 962 – the Community Health Center and Primary Care Workforce Expansion Act of 2019*, legislation I cosponsor that would reauthorize and raise funding levels for CHCs and the NHSC for five years. I am also calling on Congress to extend and increase funding for the THCGME to help meet the CHC workforce needs. Long-term and robust funding is necessary in order to ensure health centers have the support and stability they need to maintain and expand services, train and recruit providers, purchase equipment, and plan strategically to meet current and future needs of the community.

In 2017, Congress extended and increased funding for CHCs, the NHSC, and the THCGME public health programs in a bipartisan manner<sup>9</sup>. Congress must once again rise to the challenge and ensure that CHCs have the long-term, stable funding needed to provide health care access for the millions of individuals that rely on them for care. Congress needs to do everything it can to protect and increase CHC funding that improves access to facilities, support for providers, and care for patients.

Sincerely,



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

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<sup>7</sup> “*HRSA Grants – FY2018*.” Published by Health Resources and Service Administration. For Fiscal Year 2018. Available online at: <https://data.hrsa.gov/>

<sup>8</sup> “*Politico New York Health Care*.” Published by Shannon Young. December 2019. Available online at: <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/newsletters/politico-new-york-health-care>

<sup>9</sup> “*Community Health Centers Undergo ‘Chaos and Confusion’ Without Long-Term Funding*.” Published by Yusra Morad. November 2019. Available online at: <https://morningconsult.com/2019/11/21/community-health-centers-undergo-chaos-confusion-without-long-term-funding/>