

Durbin, Duckworth join bipartisan effort to immediately fund community health centers

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and 63 other members to call on Senate leadership to immediately reauthorize funding for our nation’s community health centers. In a bipartisan letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY), Durbin, Duckworth, and 65 of their Senate colleagues expressed their strong support for

community health centers, which provide access to cost-effective primary and preventive care for families across the country.

“Community health centers serve a vital function, providing affordable health care to our nation’s most vulnerable citizens,”wrote the senators. **“They provide quality medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health care to more than 27 million patients, including 330,000 of our nation’s veterans and 8 million children, at over 10,000 sites nationwide. ... Without extension of the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF), community health centers will lose seventy percent of their funding. This will result in an estimated 2,800 site closures, the loss of 50,000 jobs, and approximately 9 million Americans losing access to their health care.”**

As the senators note in their letter, the CHCF expired on September 30, 2017. The failure to reauthorize the fund has jeopardized access to care for millions of Americans, and made it difficult for community health centers to adequately plan for everything from staffing needs to securing loans for capital projects.

In addition to Durbin, Duckworth, Blunt, and Stabenow, the Senators who signed on to today’s letter include: Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), John Boozman (R-AR), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tom Carper (D-DE), Bob Casey, Jr. (D-PA), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Thad Cochran (R-MS), Christopher Coons (D-DE), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Mike Crapo (R-ID), Steve Daines (R-MT), Joe Donnelly (D-IN), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND), Dean Heller (R-NV), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), John Hoeven (R-ND), James Inhofe (R-OK), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Doug Jones (D-AL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), John Kennedy (R-LA), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Joe Manchin (R-WV), Ed Markey (D-MA), Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Bill Nelson (D-FL), Gary Peters (D-MI), Rob Portman (R-OH), Jack Reed (D-RI), James Risch (R-ID), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Tina Smith (D-MN), Jon Tester (D-MT), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Tom Udall (D-NM), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Mark Warner (D-VA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Roger Wicker (R-MS).

In September, Durbin and Duckworth joined 68 of their Senate colleagues in a [letter](#) to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Chairman and Ranking Member, expressing their strong support for community health centers and calling for an immediate extension of its critical funding.

Today, Durbin met with members of the Illinois Primary Health Care Association—representing Illinois’s 51 community health centers—to discuss the need for Congress to reauthorize long-term funding for our nation’s community health centers.

Illinois community health centers currently provide primary health care services to approximately 1.3 million Illinois residents – including one out of every four Medicaid patients – at 51 health centers with 360 treatment sites in medically underserved areas throughout the state. Illinois community health centers employ over 7,600 individuals, equaling a payroll of more than \$508 million. They also inject approximately \$800 million in operating expenditures into their communities, resulting in an overall economic impact of \$1.48 billion and overall employment of 11,700. A recent study found that Illinois community health centers save 27 percent in total spending per Medicaid patient compared to non-health center providers.

Over its 50 year history, the Health Center Program has grown from two community health centers to nearly 1,400 community health centers operating over 9,800 clinic sites in every U.S. state and territory. In 2015, community health centers employed nearly 190,000 people and served over 24 million patients. One in 13 people nationwide rely on a HRSA-funded community health center for their preventive and primary health care needs.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

February 5, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We write to express our concern over funding for community health centers, which expired on September 30, 2017. We strongly urge you to reauthorize this funding immediately.

Community health centers serve a vital function, providing affordable health care to our nation's most vulnerable citizens. They provide quality medical, dental, vision and behavioral health care to more than 27 million patients, including 330,000 of our nation's veterans and 8 million children, at over 10,000 sites nationwide. By offering preventative care, treating chronic conditions, and working to fight the opioid epidemic, community health centers are not only greatly improving the health and well-being of those they serve, they are also saving significant taxpayer dollars.

Without extension of the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF), community health centers will lose seventy percent of their funding. This will result in an estimated 2,800 site closures, the loss of 50,000 jobs, and approximately 9 million Americans losing access to their health care. Moreover, community health centers operate as small businesses and require a level of predictability to operate and respond to the needs of their communities. Since the expiration of the CHCF, community health centers have not been able to adequately plan for everything from staffing needs to securing loans for capital projects. In addition, the expiration of the National Health Service Corps and Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education program threatens the ability of health centers to meet their workforce needs.

For more than fifty years, community health centers have experienced strong bipartisan support. In fact, twenty bipartisan senators cosponsor legislation which reauthorizes funding not only for community health centers but also for the National Health Service Corps.

We look forward to working with you to reach a bipartisan agreement to fund the community health center program and enable our community health centers to continue providing high quality and affordable care to those in need.