

Dear Colleague,

Please join us in signing a letter to HHS Secretary Alex Azar requesting the prioritization of federally-qualified community health centers (FQHCs) to receive adequate funding from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund. As we continue to fight to protect the American people during this pandemic, it is imperative that we provide resources to our most vulnerable communities and those that serve them.

Historically, FQHCs have proved to be the health care safety net for millions of Americans. These institutions provide comprehensive, high-quality and cost-effective health care to our most underserved communities and serve more than 28 million individuals nationwide each year. This is even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when the services of FQHCs are high priority given their locations to the community.

To ensure that FQHCs will be able to continue their services and sustain operation, please sign on to this letter requesting adequate funding for FQHCs. Please contact Christopher Cox at [Christopher.Cox@mail.house.gov](mailto:Christopher.Cox@mail.house.gov) if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Yvette D. Clarke

Member of Congress

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May XX, 2020

Alex M. Azar II

Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Hubert H. Humphrey Building

200 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20201

Secretary Azar,

The City of New York is the epicenter of the crisis and response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, with over 175,000 cases of the 1 million cases in the United States. Community Health Centers (CHCs) are on the frontlines of this crisis, providing medical care and testing for over 2.4 million low-income New Yorkers. The third coronavirus relief bill, the CARES Act, included a \$100 billion pool of funding for the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund, of which, a portion of the funds have already been distributed. Most recently, \$10 billion was allocated for a targeted distribution to hospitals in areas that have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, an important step to supporting our public health system. Federally-qualified community health centers (FQHCs), who are also actively testing and treating COVID-19 patients in hot-spot areas, are similarly crucial for the success of our nation's recovery from this pandemic, and **must receive dedicated funding from future allocations of the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund, with prioritization for regions that have been hit hardest by COVID-19.**

New York's FQHCs are on the front lines of responding to COVID-19, and under increasing and immense financial strain at this time. Community health centers have responded to the crisis with innovation and determination, creating new models of care to provide testing and treatment for COVID-19, staffing public health responses, preventing overcrowded emergency departments, and continuing to support patients with chronic conditions. Mounting evidence points to the disproportionate effect of the coronavirus on communities of color, where community health centers are often the only primary care providers and sole point of access to healthcare. The necessity for a strong safety-net system has never been more critical, as unemployment reaches its highest levels since the great depression and Americans find themselves with little or no

health insurance coverage. Patients who recover from COVID-19 face yet another hurdle: the possibility of long-term health implications, as is common with severe upper respiratory infections, and the need for ongoing care in an outpatient setting.

Access to the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund and future federal aid, specifically for FQHCs in areas that have been greatly impacted by COVID-19 is imperative to the survival of these health centers, and the success of the healthcare system as a whole. The mounting financial hardships experienced by these community health centers, has already resulted in closures, furloughs, and layoffs, resulting in the further diminishment of the already thin resources of the safety net, the ripple effects of which will be felt through a further weakening of the healthcare system in its entirety. If HRSA does not designate funds to areas of greatest need, the health center system of states like New York, will be decimated without hope of recovery from this public health crisis. We must ensure that FQHCs can sustain operation of their services so the most vulnerable of our communities are protected.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Yvette D. Clarke

Member of Congress