



September 19, 2023

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Senator Marshall:

On behalf of the 1,487 Community Health Centers nationwide, I write to express our appreciation and support for your leadership in introducing the *Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Care Workforce Act*, which extends and increases funding for Community Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), and the Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education program (THCGME). Health centers nationwide appreciate your efforts to invest in expanding these essential programs to meet current and future needs. Action on these national priorities is urgently needed since federal funding for these programs expires September 30, 2023.

I look forward to the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee markup this week and hope the Senate can consider the legislation soon after. We stand ready to work with you and all other Members of Congress to achieve a bipartisan consensus bill that can pass the Senate and be signed by President Biden expeditiously.

For nearly 60 years, health centers have provided high-quality, affordable primary and preventive care, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision, and other essential services to America's most vulnerable patients. They represent the best and most innovative part of our nation's health system. Today, 1,487 health center organizations have more than 15,000 locations, employing well over 300,000 qualified and dedicated staff. Additionally, the health center model reflects the most diverse part of our health system with locations in urban, rural, frontier, and island communities. That diversity extends to our patients, almost two-thirds of whom are racial or ethnic minorities, our primary care workforce, who not only represent the people they serve, but also represent disciplines from physicians to nurses to psychologists to dentists to community health workers, and the payers we work with from Medicaid, Medicare, Commercial, and self-pay on a sliding fee scale.

Health centers recently reached a historic milestone of serving over 31.5 million patients, including 8.8 million children, 3.5 million elderly, 1.4 million homeless, and 400,000 veterans. Health centers provide care to one in seven rural residents, one in six Medicaid beneficiaries, and one in three people in poverty.

The *Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Care Workforce Act* would make historic investments in the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF), which provides a substantial portion of health centers' federal grant funding. Your legislation's three-year extension of the CHCF will provide

health centers with the certainty they need to meet their communities' growing needs successfully. The increased annual funding level for CHCF in your bill will allow health centers to invest in infrastructure improvements, increase the number of patients served, provide greater access to dental, behavioral health, and nutrition services, enhance case management, and enabling services for underserved populations. Expansion of these services will decrease the burden of illness and reduce long-term health care spending in every state and territory.

Health centers also greatly appreciate the unprecedented investment your legislation would make in the primary care workforce of the future through the NHSC and the THCGME programs. The three-year extension and increased funding for NHSC would support 20,000 new loan repayment awards and 2,100 scholarships annually for health care students and professionals. The five-year extension of the THCGME program will help train up to 2,800 new physicians by 2031. Between them, these two provisions will encourage more students and health care trainees to choose primary care careers and work in rural and underserved areas, meaningfully decreasing workforce shortages. We also support the other health workforce programs in your legislation that will help train and retain thousands of nurses and primary care providers nationwide.

Health centers are particularly grateful for Section 212 of the legislation, which would support innovative and replicable community-led workforce solutions. Health centers have a track record of developing successful community partnerships, career laddering, and preceptor training-to-practice programs for allied health professionals. These essential workers have long gone without dedicated federal training and career development support. This legislation recognizes that health centers are leading the way in cultivating the next generation of health care professionals, generating good-paying jobs in communities across the country, and resolving workforce challenges that would otherwise impede local economies.

Again, I appreciate your championing bipartisan solutions for these critically important issues. Thank you again for your leadership and commitment to Community Health Centers, the workforce programs they rely upon, the staff that make them so effective, and the patients who count on them for their health and well-being.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kyu Rhee".

Kyu, Rhee, M.D., MPP
President and Chief Executive Officer