

United States Senate

August 8, 2019

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

This week, communities across the country are marking the importance of community health centers as part of National Health Center Week. This annual celebration marks the accomplishments of America's 1,400 health centers across more than 11,000 communities that serve 28 million Americans with comprehensive primary and preventive care services. Community health centers expand access to health care while saving the country \$24 billion a year. During National Health Center Week, I write to urge you to take action to reauthorize the Community Health Center Fund (CHCF) before it expires on September 30 by bringing legislation to the Floor that provides long-term certainty for community health centers.

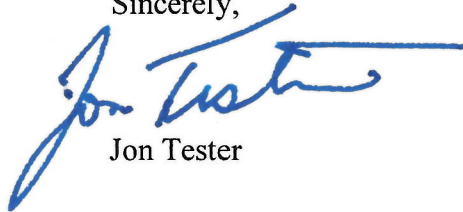
In Montana, community health centers play a central role in serving patients across the state, particularly for families in rural and frontier communities. A majority of Montana counties are designated as primary care shortage areas, so the 65 community health center delivery sites across my home state are vital to maintaining the wellbeing of our communities. In 2017, Montana's community health centers served more than 107,000 people including 20,300 children, 5,000 homeless Montanans, and 4,600 veterans.

Just as our health centers are critically important to our states, the CHCF is essential to maintaining the services that community health centers provide. Established in 2011, CHCF funds a range of health center activities and services, ranging from hiring new staff and making capital improvements to behavioral health integration, substance use disorder treatment, and telehealth technology. The CHCF also provides an important investment in the National Health Service Corps, a scholarship and loan repayment program that is an important tool in recruiting providers to practice in underserved areas, including health centers. In fiscal year 2019, the CHCF comprised more than 70 percent of total federal funding for health centers.

Less than two years ago, Congress acted recklessly by allowing CHCF funding to expire. Though ultimately reauthorized for two years in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, the funding delay caused immense uncertainty for health centers and patients across the nation. In response, many community health centers considered instituting hiring freezes, laying off staff, or reducing hours of operation. This year, Congress cannot play politics with families' health care by allowing funding for these critical care delivery sites to face this insecurity once again.

During National Health Center Week, I write to urge immediate action on reauthorization of the Community Health Center Fund before its expiration on September 30, 2019. The care delivered to millions of patients across the country cannot be ensnared into Washington's partisan politics. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester