*TEMPLATE Member of Congress Op-Ed - Health Center Funding Cliff*

**Time for Congress to Act On A Health Care Solution That Works**

Health care can be one of the more divisive political issues that any policymaker has to work on. Every decision we make in the Congress has a real impact on people’s lives, and the stakes couldn’t be higher. As Congress continues to debate ways to move our system to one that’s focused on patient needs, with greater access, higher quality and lower costs, there’s one solution virtually all of us agree on: Community Health Centers, or CHCs. With critical funding for these centers set to expire at the end of September, we need to prioritize action to maintain and build on this health care success story.

Begun more than fifty years ago, today our nation’s CHCs are located in nearly 11,000 communities across the country, representing the nation’s largest primary care network. CHCs offer comprehensive and high-quality care to everyone who walks through their doors – over 27 million people nationally. That’s one in twelve Americans. Even more striking (1 in 6 Americans in Rural Areas, 1 in 10 Children, 1 in 3 Americans living in poverty) get their care at a CHC.

In my district, we have XX health center organizations who collectively leverage $XX million in federal investment to serve XX,XXX people at XX locations. (See <http://www.nachc.org/congressional-district-fact-sheets/>) I’ve been to many of these locations, and seen in person what a difference these organizations make in the lives of our neighbors, and in the health of our community. Unfortunately, if we in Congress don’t act, and act quickly, our CHCs – and the patients they serve – are at serious risk.

Congress has a full plate this fall. But one thing we must prioritize is the extension of funding for Community Health Centers. If Congress doesn’t act to extend this critical funding, CHCs will face a 70% reduction in federal support. According to the Federal Government’s own estimates, that level of reduction would lead to closure of some 2,800 CHC locations, loss of more than 50,000 jobs, and most importantly, a loss of access to care for some 9 million patients.

That’s not just a humanitarian disaster, it’s a fiscal one as well. If patients don’t have access to primary care in their communities, they turn to hospital emergency rooms for routine care, or defer needed care until their health problems are more serious and more costly. That’s common sense, but the research on this topic shows it’s the reality. A 2016 study showed that when patients on Medicaid get their care at a CHC, their *total* cost of care was lower by 24%. The old saw about “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is the reality happening at Community Health Centers every day.

On a bipartisan basis and through successive administrations, Congress has invested in CHCs, bringing new health centers to communities in need and adding services like dental care and substance abuse treatment to meet the needs of patients. Indeed, the funding that’s set to expire at the end of September was passed on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis in 2015 – a rarity in this political environment.

So with so much uncertainty in our health care system, let’s build on consensus and build on success. I support extending funding for CHCs for at least five years, with at least the current levels of funding, so that our community knows it has a stable and reliable place to go for care. I’m committed to working together with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to get this done.