

November 14, 2007

**THE
CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION**
OF THE UNITED STATES

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Alexander:



On behalf of The Catholic Health Association, the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic health care sponsors, systems, hospitals, facilities, and related organizations, I am writing to ask your support for the inclusion of the Integrated Health Systems Demonstration Project in the Health Centers Renewal Act. The Integrated Health Systems demonstration project is designed to integrate care and expand access to primary, preventative, specialty, and hospital care in as many as 30 medically underserved areas.

The Integrated Health Systems demonstration project is modeled on the work of many of our members and would allow for expansion of integrated community care clinics that provide the uninsured access to the full range of services in a coordinated way. Along with Community Health Centers, our safety net clinics are already serving the uninsured, and the need is still growing in many communities across the country. HRSA estimates that 44 million Americans still lack access to primary care even with the doubling of Community Health Centers over the past decade. In addition, the journal *Health Affairs* recently published a study that found uninsured and low-income families that seek primary and preventive care at community health centers often have a difficult time assessing specialty care. Under the integrated health system demonstration, funding would be directed toward integrated community care clinics that can provide all levels of care for low income families in their communities.

In my previous position as President and CEO of Providence Hospital, I was asked by the community residents living in the Sursum Corda neighborhood, one of the poorest communities in Washington, DC, to come to their community and open a health center. In 1996, I did just that. The Perry Family Health Center is housed in a historic former school that is less than one mile from the nation's Capitol. Thirty percent of the residents in the immediate area served by the Center are below the poverty level; over 54 percent are below 200 percent of poverty. At last count, the Center had an annual patient census of about 15,000, with an additional 3,000 community service assistance encounters.

The goal of the Center is to provide the people it serves with a "medical home," where a patient is seen regardless of ability to pay and where a patient may routinely seek medical care. Building on that concept, the Center also provides timely access to specialty providers and hospital services. Clinical outcomes are significantly enhanced as a result of the Center's access to Providence Hospital's real-time patient information system, enabling it to track patients through the continuum of care. A major advantage of the Center's connection with Providence Hospital is that the Center's patients gain immediate access to specialty providers. Such timely access helps to produce better health care outcomes. Similarly, the hospital-center connection facilitates timely provider follow-up to emergency room care, which helps to reduce "ER frequent flyers."

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The Perry Family Health Center relies on public and private insurance for funding, as well as grants and local foundations. Providence Hospital also provides a subsidy. Keeping the Center financially afloat, however, is an ongoing challenge as is the increasing needs of its community. The Integrated Health System demonstration project would allow integrated community care clinics such as The Perry Family Health Center to expand access to all levels of need care in very vulnerable communities. We hope we can count on your support for inclusion of this very important demonstration project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Carol Keehan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO
The Catholic Health Association