

Thursday, February 28, 2008

The Honorable Bart Stupak
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515



Dear Representative Stupak:

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 thank you for sponsoring the Patients and Public Health Partnership Act of 2008. This legislation would establish up to thirty demonstration sites for qualifying integrated health systems to expand health care access and provide the full range of services in medically underserved areas.

The Patients and Public Health Partnership Act would allow integrated health systems both to expand access to primary and preventive care, and ensure access to necessary specialty and hospital care. Under the proposal, \$25 million would be provided for FY2009, FY2010 and FY2011 to establish three-year grants for the demonstration projects. 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. We commend this legislative proposal for its development with significant input from the National Association of Community Health Centers, making Integrated Health Systems and Community Health Centers partners in helping to expand health care services as the number of uninsured in our nation continues to grow.

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

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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."

The Patients and Public Health Partnership Act would expand access to all levels of care in vulnerable communities, and we thank you again for supporting this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr. Carol Keehan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO

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Cc: Jamie Euken