

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D.C.

June 21, 2012

Via Electronic Transmission

Mary K. Wakefield, PhD, RN
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Dr. Wakefield,

As you know, in 2010 the Health Center Program (health center) administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded more than 1,100 health centers and served more than 19 million people. In many localities, health centers currently play an important role in helping underserved and low-income patient populations access medical care.

Today we are releasing two new reports by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) that examine HRSA's oversight of the health center program.¹ GAO serves the American people by providing Congress with an objective, transparent evaluation of the executive branch's stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Though millions of underserved and low-income Americans are helped through access to the medical care and services they receive at health centers, the benefits of the program are more attributable to local health care providers than to HRSA employees. As the GAO reports detail, HRSA's management of the program is inconsistent, inadequate, and inexcusable. Given the lack of strong internal controls and transparency, we are concerned that HRSA's mismanagement of the program is likely wasting taxpayer dollars and potentially jeopardizing patients' access to care.² In particular, we are concerned about HRSA's inadequate management of the program in light of the health center program's dramatic expansion in recent years.³

Immediate action is needed to ensure HRSA effectively and consistently manages the health center program and acts in the best interest of patients and taxpayers. Thankfully, GAO has outlined reasonable, specific, and concrete steps HRSA can take to make the program more transparent and accountable to patients and taxpayers. We believe you share our goal of

¹ GAO reports 12-504 and 12-546.

² Taxpayer dollars may be wasted when inefficient or ineligible grantees are repeatedly funded, and patient access to care may be jeopardized when health centers are poorly managed.

³ The Health Center Program's annual funding more than doubled from approximately \$1.3 billion to about \$2.8 billion, from fiscal year 2002 through fiscal year 2012. The program's fiscal year 2009 funding included \$2 billion that HRSA received through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009,⁴ and its fiscal years 2011 and 2012 funding included a total of \$2.2 billion HRSA received through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). Furthermore, for fiscal years 2013 through 2015, PPACA appropriated an additional \$7.3 billion to HRSA to provide grants for the operation and expansion of health centers.

improving HRSA oversight to make the health center program more effective and efficient. With your leadership, HRSA can adopt common-sense improvements and ameliorate any need for legislative action on these issues.

On behalf of patients and taxpayers, to ensure the health center program is managed in a more transparent and accountable manner, we respectfully request HRSA submit to our offices a detailed management plan outlining the specific steps HRSA will take to implement GAO's recommendations. We respectfully request that you provide this management plan by July 27th. We also invite you and your senior management team to meet with our offices sooner to discuss the findings of the GAO reports in more detail.

Because millions of patients receive care from the program, we know you share our goal to ensure the program's oversight is effective and successful. Thank you for your careful consideration of these two new GAO reports on the health center program. If you have any questions about our request, please feel free to contact our staff.

Sincerely,



Tom Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Michael B. Enzi
U.S. Senator



Richard Burr
U.S. Senator