

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Dorothy A. Fink, MD
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Acting Secretary Fink,

We are writing on behalf of the over 440,000 people in Connecticut who receive medical, dental, or behavioral health services at a Community Health Center (health center). As a result of the President's Executive orders on January 20, 2025, as well as the subsequent guidance from the Office of Management and Budget, the health centers are continuing to experience disruptions in payment and communications that have already impacted services and will be catastrophic soon if not remediated.

The goal of health centers is to provide primary and preventative care to patients, regardless of their ability to pay. In Connecticut and across the country, health centers are a lifeline for vulnerable populations. 1 in 8 Connecticut residents rely on health centers. These are often people with no where else to turn. 60% of health center patients in Connecticut are on Medicaid, while 16% are uninsured and 68% of these patients are below the federal poverty level. A threat to health center funding and operations is a threat to the health of our most vulnerable patients in Connecticut.

Health centers depend on federal funds to serve vulnerable populations. Most Connecticut health centers have only 57 days of cash on hand and would have to cut services and staff within two weeks of funding disruptions. For these reasons, the actions of the Trump Administration have put these health centers at risk. Since late January, following the announcement of the funding freeze, Connecticut health centers have experienced lock outs from the Payment Management System (PMS) where they normally draw down funds, experienced significant delays in receiving funds they are entitled to and undergone unusual review processes to ultimately access those funds. These disruptions have continued even following a judge's court order blocking the funding freeze and have resulted in at least one center unsure if it can make its next payroll. In addition to disruptions in payments, centers have noted an inability to get feedback from normal communication channels with HRSA and the Electronic Handbooks (EHBs) system being inaccessible.

Health center leaders in Connecticut say that they are experiencing unprecedented panic from both staff and patients, who are unclear whether funds can be drawn down for services like

cancer detection and early childhood development due to recent the Executive Orders. Additionally, patients are unsure whether they will be served and are cancelling appointments, which will compromise their health and lead to more emergency room visits down the line. Given these impactful disruptions and the stress on our health centers, we request answers to the following questions by no later than February 14, 2025:

1. What is the average time for submission of draw-down requests and receiving funding in PMS?
 - a. How has that number changed between January 1, 2024, and the present?
 - b. How has that number changed, daily, since January 27, 2025?
2. How many health center draw-down requests have been denied since January 27, 2025?
 - a. What is the rationale for these denials?
3. Please list all disruptions of HRSA systems that could impact health centers, the length of these disruptions and the cause of these disruptions.
4. What specific authority and under which executive action did HRSA or the Department of Health and Human Services use to restrict health center access to the PMS and funding that they had been previously awarded?
5. Please provide a list of regular standing calls or meetings between HRSA staff and HRSA grantees that have been cancelled since January 20, 2025.
6. Please outline a plan of communication to respond to future disruptions.


Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



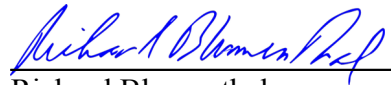
Jim Himes
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress