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Gallatin City-County Health Department

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February 24, 2011

Gretchen Rupp, Chair
Gallatin City-County Board of Health
215 W. Mendenhall
Bozeman, MT 59715

Legislator Tom Burnett
House District 63
4143 Rain Roper Dr
Bozeman, MT 59715-0634

Dear Legislator Tom Burnett,

As chair of the Gallatin City-County Board of Health, I am writing on behalf of the Board to call your attention to potential consequences of a proposal that would force Montana health care providers to refuse \$35 million in federal dollars to help doctors and nurses provide integrated, high-quality health care services in Gallatin County. If approved, this legislation would have a direct negative impact on the health of Montanans by damaging efforts by the state and its healthcare providers to use electronic medical records to provide better care to Montanans. This legislation would be a step backward for health care in the state, and would harm the health of the state's most vulnerable residents.

Specifically, we would like to call your attention to a decision made by the Joint House and Senate Subcommittee on Health and Human Services to reject the federal Health Information Technology Incentive Payments that would provide roughly \$35 million in incentives to medical providers serving underserved populations to adopt, implement, and upgrade electronic health record software (Proposal 11130). These payments will provide essential funding to support health care providers in Montana to improve patient care and safety, and to comply with Medicaid and Medicare reporting requirements.

We can glimpse the potential negative impact on the state by examining the legislation's potential negative impact on Gallatin County's community health center, Community Health Partners (CHP). The loss of these funds would directly affect more than 10,600 patients served each year by CHP, a non-profit organization which is the only federally qualified community health center in Gallatin County. CHP provides high-quality, affordable medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, and educational services in Park and Gallatin County to all residents regardless of their ability to pay. CHP implemented an electronic health record system in conjunction with the Bozeman Deaconess Health Group in April, 2009. This community-wide system allows for streamlined referral systems between primary care and specialty providers, helps avoid duplication of information and costly tests, guides medical teams with evidence-based care reminders for patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, and allows essential health information to be shared when it benefits patients, such as after clinic hours or during an emergency room visit. Stated another way, electronic medical records allow doctors to track and coordinate patient care in amazingly innovative ways. This legislation would damage that effort immeasurably, and in the process harm patients.

Community Health Partners is striving to provide 21st century health care to Montanans. The incentive payments will provide valuable resources to allow CHP, and other healthcare providers serving uninsured Montanans and those covered by Medicaid, to improve health outcomes in Gallatin County. The \$212,500 in incentive payments CHP is eligible to begin receiving this year (and over \$700,000 in the next five years), will allow CHP to prescribe medications electronically, while also streamlining billing systems and developing the capability to report on important health indicators for our population. CHP will be able to track important health indicators, such as the number of two year olds who are fully immunized and the number of patients with diabetes who have received important exams during the recommended time intervals.

Community Health Partners is only one provider. This legislation would affect many providers in a similar manner. It seems very short-sighted to reject this funding, that requires no match from Montana.

We thank you for the time and energy that you devote to your service in the Legislature, and for taking the time to deal with this issue. However, we do not understand the rationale behind a refusal to accept funding that would benefit so many Montanans. We would greatly appreciate hearing back from you about this issue in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen Rupp". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Gretchen Rupp
Chair
Gallatin City-County Board of Health