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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,

I am writing on behalf of the Gallatin City-County Board of Health to call your attention to potential consequences of cost-saving decisions being contemplated by the Legislature. Some of these decisions would have significant and lasting negative impacts on this community, and we believe we would not be doing our job if we failed to bring these potential problems to your attention.

We are concerned about two proposals in particular. In both cases, the contemplated cost-saving decisions will lead to worse health outcomes for those who live in our community, as well as much higher long-term health care costs.

The Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MTUPP): The de-funding of the MTUPP program would mean an end to the state's most consistent and effective effort to help Montanans avoid the terrible health consequences of tobacco use. Even worse: the cut would likely cost the state far more in long term health care costs than could ever be saved by killing the program. We know that each one percent rise in tobacco use in Montana results in 7,500 additional smokers, 2,100 more children who grow up addicted to tobacco, and 2,000 additional smoking-related deaths. In economic terms, a one percent rise in smoking rates costs Montanans an additional \$108 million in long-term health care costs. (data attached)

It should also be noted that these dollars are not tax revenue, but rather derived from a legal settlement with tobacco companies. In 2002, Montanans voted to use about one-third of the tobacco settlement funds on programs that encourage people to quit using tobacco, and help children avoid tobacco. Recent public opinion polling shows that residents remain overwhelmingly supportive of that decision.

The Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services voted 5-to-3 to cut \$16 million in funding from the program over two years. The proposed cut would have direct and significant ramifications for Gallatin County residents and Bozeman Public Schools, which stand to lose roughly \$80,000 per year in funding to help people stop using tobacco, reduce exposure to second hand smoke, and operate a community program for tobacco prevention activities. In addition to the Quitline, Bozeman Public Schools employs the county's only tobacco prevention coordinator to build community awareness about tobacco use and mobilize resources for people who want to quit and who want their children to avoid tobacco. The funding cut would mean an end to the only consistent, comprehensive source of funding in Gallatin County that engages young people in their schools regarding the effects and dangers of tobacco use. The tobacco prevention coordinator is also the lead agent in Gallatin County working

with business owners to implement provisions of the state's Clean Indoor Air Act. Elimination of the program, as proposed, would likely mean an end to these prevention programs and an additional burden on local governments to enforce the state's indoor air quality rules.

The bottom line: this proposal means that Montanans would end up paying more in tax dollars to deal with increased number of deaths and hospitalizations related to tobacco use. We believe the proposal is short-sighted and ill-conceived.

Reproductive Health Services: The subcommittee also recommended eliminating \$900,000 over two years for local clinics that provide reproductive health services for low-income women. This proposal would have significant and lasting impact in Gallatin County, where Bridger Clinic stands to lose more than \$70,000 per year in funding used to provide contraceptive services for women who would not otherwise be able to afford those services. Each year, Bridger Clinic provides family planning and related health services to over 6,000 patients from Gallatin County and surrounding communities. This funding reduction would impact nearly all the clinic's patient base.

Staff at Bridger Clinic - a non-profit organization with a mission to serve the underserved - knows that some patients will not act to prevent an unwanted pregnancy if they deem contraception unaffordable. As you can imagine, each new unplanned birth creates a cascade of costs to the family, our community, health care providers, schools, local governments and state Medicaid coffers. We also know that women who are deterred from seeking family-planning services are also far less likely to seek preventive care such as screening for cancer and sexually transmitted disease. The evidence shows that family-planning healthcare and contraception saves approximately four dollars for every one dollar invested. Using that evidence-based calculation, Montana and its taxpayers stand to incur at least an additional \$3.6 million in costs from Medicaid-related births as a result of these budget cuts. The proposed cuts would damage family-planning services, thereby leading to increased community and government costs as a result of unintended births to low income and at-risk families in Gallatin County.

In summary, the two activities targeted for budget cuts are sound, evidence-based health-maintenance activities that save lives and reduce the long-term health care costs for all Montanans. The proposed cuts would cost the state and its citizens far more money in health care costs than would be saved.

We thank you for the time and energy that you devote to your service in the Legislature, and for taking time to deal with these issues at this time. We would appreciate hearing back from you about these issues in the near future.

Sincerely,



Gretchen Rupp
Chair
Gallatin City-County Board of Health