

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of the House Rural Health Care Coalition (RHCC) and on behalf of our constituents in rural America, we urge you to support rural health care programs by including funding for them in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 Budget of the United States Government. These programs, created either specifically for rural areas or for all underserved areas, work together to address the pressing and unique health care needs of rural Americans. Funding required to maintain rural health programs is a relatively small amount when compared to the enormous benefit they provide to communities we represent. Therefore, we appeal to you to allocate FY 2005 (enacted) funding levels for the programs listed below.

Rural Health Outreach and Network Grants

FY 2007 Recommendation \$40 million

This grant program supports innovative health care delivery systems and integrated health care networks to increase access to health care services in rural America. It places an emphasis on creating community-based partnerships amongst rural health care providers to leverage scarce resources and build sustainable health care delivery systems.

Rural Health Flexibility (FLEX) Program

FY 2007 Recommendation \$40 million

The Critical Access Hospital program, a component of the FLEX program, is instrumental in guaranteeing access to basic inpatient, outpatient and emergency services to residents of rural communities. The Small Hospital Improvement Grant program, also a component of the FLEX program, provides grants to small rural hospitals. These grants aid rural facilities in integrating quality improvement strategies including health information technology.

Rural Telemedicine Grant Program

FY 2007 Recommendation \$6.8 million

This grant program increases access to health care services in underserved, remote rural communities through the use of advanced telecommunications technology. Telemedicine reduces the isolation of rural providers and provides patients access to specialty care in their communities.

State Offices of Rural Health Grant Program

FY2007 Recommendation \$8.4 million

This program is a small matching grant program that promotes the operation of state offices of rural health. These offices provide technical assistance to rural communities and help them tap state and national resources available for rural health and economic development. State offices of rural health also administer the Medicare Rural Health Flexibility Program that supports Critical Access Hospitals, the foundation of the health care infrastructure in rural America.

Rural Health Research and Policy

FY 2007 Recommendation \$9 million

The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) is funded through this line. Congress created ORHP nearly 20 years ago to ensure that rural considerations are taken into account as HHS develops policy and implements programs. In addition, this funding stream also supports eight academic-based rural health research centers that study a variety of rural health issues such as access to care and quality. This is the sole source of rural-specific health services research supported by HHS. This line is a fundamental element of the HHS-wide Rural Initiative.

The RHCC is grateful for your support in recognizing the need for providing a sound future for the delivery of health care in rural America. We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

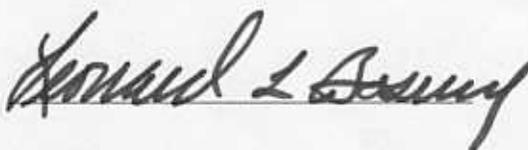
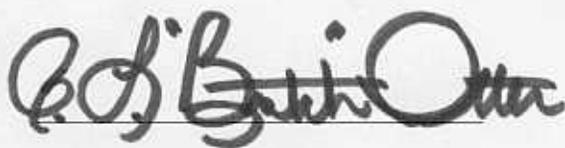


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Earl Pomeroy, Co-Chair
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CC: Joshua Bolton, Director, Office of Management and Budget



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