

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We write to you today to emphasize the need for additional support for health providers caring for the most vulnerable Arizonans, which include our rural providers, senior care communities, and safety net providers, like Federally-Qualified Health Centers and Critical Access Hospitals. As providers and health facilities in our state continue to struggle with insufficient staffing levels and elevated levels of delayed care, we believe additional relief dollars, including funding for the Uninsured Program within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), remains critical.

Arizona has received just \$227 in Provider Relief Funds per capita, the third lowest amount among all states and Washington, DC.¹ For safety net providers, rural providers, and community health centers who were operating at narrow margins even before the pandemic and whose patient populations are among the hardest hit by COVID-19, such levels of relief are entirely insufficient and impact their ability to provide care. Some of these facilities, including Arizona's only publicly-funded health system which operates the largest inpatient behavioral health program in the state, is already reporting a \$50 million shortfall for 2022. With potential new variants looming, Arizona's rural providers will be unable to afford the needed nursing staff to care for their at-risk communities, many of whom are medically-underserved, including agricultural, older, and tribal populations. In addition, Arizona's long term care facilities, including assisted living, memory care and similar elder-care providers, have received a disproportionately low amount of financial relief, and many continue to operate at a loss—and may have to close if they do not receive additional support. We must do more to ensure providers caring for our state's most vulnerable are able to remain operational.

For more than two years, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) COVID-19 Uninsured Program has provided reliable reimbursement to providers who vaccinate, test, or treat individuals without health insurance. This has been a lifeline for many health care providers. As you know, the Uninsured Program stopped accepting new claims for testing and treatment on March 22 and will no longer accept claims for vaccination on April 5 due to lack of funds. With more than

¹ HHS Provider Relief Fund Data by State as of March 10, 2022, Health Resources & Services Administration; United States Census Bureau Population Estimate as of July 1, 2021

800,000 Arizonans without health insurance, this will have a significant impact on the ability of vulnerable Arizonans to receive care. Need for this assistance remains: Sonora Quest Diagnostic, which processes 60 percent of COVID-19 tests in the state, has submitted more than 690,000 testing claims to the Uninsured Program, with 190,000 of those claims from the recent Omicron wave still largely awaiting reimbursement.

As described by the Arizona Alliance for Community Health Centers, which has served as Arizona’s primary care association for 37 years, “the loss of the Uninsured Program and a variety of testing, vaccination, and treatment programs will have a devastating impact on our communities... A significant portion of our communities will not be able to afford the increased costs for testing, vaccinations and treatment and will not have access if these programs are ended.”

We know the need for additional relief is dire. As Congress works to meet this need, we are also committed to ensuring there is an accurate and timely accounting of all COVID-19 monies allocated to date by HHS, which will only help target our efforts.

We appreciate the investments that have been made over the past two years to keep our health care providers, and the patients they care for, afloat. We cannot let these investments end before our state’s needs do. Thank you for considering this request for supplemental funding.


Sincerely,



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress