



May 17, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee  
156 Dirksen  
Washington, DC 205150

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee  
131 Dirksen  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of rural patients and providers, write to express our strong support for President Biden's proposal to fund a Rural Health Clinic (RHC) Behavioral Health Initiative as part of the FY 2023 Appropriations.

Since the creation of the program in 1977, federally certified RHCs have been providing essential care to residents of rural medically underserved communities. RHCs, along with rural hospitals and Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs), provide an indispensable safety net of care to this population. In order to meet the healthcare needs of their communities, RHCs strive to offer both medical and behavioral health services.

Unfortunately, finding behavioral health providers to work in underserved rural areas is very difficult and the behavioral health needs of our patient population too often go unmet. We are very grateful that President Biden's budget includes \$10 million for a new RHC Behavioral Health Initiative, which would cover the salary and other start-up costs of hiring behavioral health providers in rural health clinics. This initiative, if approved, would be the first Congressionally appropriated federal grant program specifically for federally certified RHCs.

**We are writing to request that Congress appropriate the money necessary to fund the President's budget request for a Rural Health Clinic Behavioral Health Initiative.**

Specifically, we request that the Appropriations Committee fully fund this vital initiative by appropriating \$10 million to the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) through either a specific line-item appropriation, or through the FORHP Rural Health Care Services Outreach program budget line with accompanying report language.

The President's Budget also proposes to modernize Medicare mental health benefits by allowing RHCs to bill for Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and Marriage and Family Therapists (MFT) services. Not only will recognizing LPCs and MFTs help address the workforce crisis, should it be funded, RHCs could utilize the RHC Behavioral Health Initiative to bring these behavioral health professionals to rural, underserved populations.

Together, these proposals could go a long way towards meeting the behavioral health needs of our rural areas and we hope that the Appropriations Committee will consider funding this initiative in FY 2023. Please contact [Nathan.Baugh@narhc.org](mailto:Nathan.Baugh@narhc.org) for additional information.

Sincerely

*Bill Finerfrock*

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National Association of  
Rural Health Clinics

*Alan Morgan*

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*Teryl Eisinger*

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