

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 10, 2020

Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

As you are no doubt aware, free and charitable clinics are an essential component of our health care system. They provide critical services to populations that might otherwise be neglected, such as rural areas, communities of color, and regions with high rates of poverty. Among those that serve the Ninth District of Virginia is The Health Wagon, an organization I have come to know and highly respect for its dedication to my constituents.

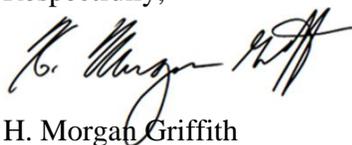
Free and charitable clinics serve patients with no health insurance and no ability to pay for care. Some do not accept payment of any sort for services they provide. Many have never established a billing relationship with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Consequently, as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) allocated significant portions of the Provider Relief Fund in accordance with 2018 patient revenues and to clinics with federal designations such as “federally qualified health center” or “rural health clinic,” these charitable caregivers were largely excluded.

It is my sincere hope that some free clinics will benefit from the undefined allocation of funds to reimburse providers for coronavirus care of the uninsured. I am concerned, however, that because many of these clinics have few staff members and no experience filing medical claims, they will not be able to effectively compile and submit detailed claims data.

I understand the Department’s reasoning for dispersing funds using the mechanisms they have, and I appreciate efforts to ensure money is getting out the door as quickly as possible. Initially, it was a sensible approach.

Now, as HHS determines how best to utilize the dollars remaining in the Provider Relief Fund, I ask that you specifically consider free and charitable clinics when making these decisions. Unfortunately, these clinics are likely to experience an even greater influx of patients than other medical providers in the coming months, as the economic consequences of COVID-19 continue to affect employment rates and health insurance coverage. Their work is extremely important, and we must ensure their ability to continue caring for patients in the future.

Respectfully,



H. Morgan Griffith
Member of Congress