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Congress of the United States
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AND CLIMATE CHANGE
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

April 1, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

I join my bipartisan colleagues in requesting that you make the financial relief of rural hospitals a priority. Rural hospitals need access to financial resources immediately and in the most streamlined manner. I also join my colleagues in requesting that you provide Members of Congress with a personal briefing on this matter by teleconference by April 3, 2020.

As you know, rural hospitals are the backbone of communities across our nation. These providers are on the frontlines combating the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. It is imperative that these health care professionals receive the immediate support they need to continue caring for our communities.

Many small and rural hospitals were already operating at a financial loss and hundreds were on the brink of closure. Now, as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, these hospitals are facing an acute financial crisis and confronting impossible choices. It is imperative that the Administration take fast and aggressive action to ensure the financial viability of these providers so as not to place our communities' health further at risk.

In response to this crisis, Congress enacted a series of bipartisan laws to rescue our economy and bolster our health care system. Most recently, we passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which includes new funding to provide financial relief for hospitals. As you know, the CARES Act provides HHS with the flexibility to deliver assistance where it is needed most. Right now, some rural hospitals are reporting they are quickly running out of operating funds and will be unable to maintain health care services during the COVID-19 outbreak. We cannot afford to ignore their urgent needs.

Most rural hospitals have also ceased performing elective procedures and seeing non-urgent patients, instead placing a priority on confronting the COVID-19 epidemic. Doing so, however,

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threatens their financial viability. Some rural hospitals have only days left of cash-on-hand—money needed for payroll and supplies.

Mr. Secretary, rural providers need your immediate assistance. Congress has provided HHS with the funding and flexibility. Now it is up to the Administration to respond with rapid action to sustain rural providers. Any unnecessary delay will only worsen this situation.

Thank you for your attention to ensuring the health and well-being of patients in rural America.

With great respect,



Bill Flores
Member of Congress