



September 1, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary, Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

I am reaching out to you on behalf of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA). NRHA is a non-profit membership organization with more than 21,000 members nationwide that provides leadership on rural health issues. Our membership includes nearly every component of rural America's health care, including rural community hospitals, critical access hospitals (CAHs), doctors, nurses, and patients. We provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education, and research.

Nationwide, but particularly in rural America, the COVID-19 Delta variant is ravaging our communities. Many of our provider members are reporting massive, unsustainable surges in COVID-19 cases. Unfortunately, the Delta variant has coincided with financial hardships and uncertainty for our provider members. Due to the June 11, 2021, [provider relief fund \(PRF\) guidelines](#) for phase one recipients (when most rural funding was dispersed), **nearly all our rural providers have been faced with having to return needed relief dollars.** The return of this funding has been devastating for our members as many believe utilizing the funding now could help ease the burden the Delta variant surges are placing on providers. Further, [significant policy changes](#) need to be made at the Departmental level regarding: **1) use of funds past June 30, 2021, for Phase 1 recipients, 2) use of capital resources based on contract status (rather than completion) as of June 30, 2021, 3) modifications to reporting requirements for cost-based providers (including CAHs and Rural Health Clinics (RHCs).**

As you are aware, rural America is facing a hospital closure crisis. Since 2010, 137 rural hospitals have closed their doors, 20 of which did so last year at the heart of the pandemic. Now, with COVID-19 cases surging, unsustainable and uncertain relief funding, and significant workforce shortages, NRHA is fearful for what this fall will bring providers. **It is imperative that HHS provide relief to rural providers by dispersing the \$8.5 billion Health Care Heroes Sustainability Fund created in the American Rescue Plan immediately.** This critical pot of money, specifically allocated for rural providers, has been sitting dormant for more than five months. As COVID-19 ravages our most vulnerable communities, it is essential these funds are distributed to small, rural providers on the front line of the pandemic response to help their facilities and growing numbers of COVID-19 patients.

NRHA urges HHS to quickly disperse this important lifeline funding authorized by Congress more than five months ago. We look forward to working with you to combat the ongoing pandemic in our rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Morgan", written over a light grey circular stamp.

Alan Morgan
Chief Executive Officer
National Rural Health Association