

U.S. House of Representatives
Rep. Sharice L. Davids
Kansas Third District

August 13, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Democratic Leader Jeffries,

As you are aware, rural communities across the nation are plagued by an ongoing health care crisis. From 2011 to 2021, more than 260 rural hospitals stopped offering obstetrics services. Since 2010, more than 167 rural communities have lost their hospital, and today, 418 facilities remain vulnerable to closure, including 38 percent of rural hospitals in Kansas. In my home state – which is one of few that has yet to expand Medicaid – a staggering 89 percent of rural hospitals are losing money.¹

The 60 million Americans that live in rural communities are facing stark disparities:

- Hospital closures have forced patients to travel more than 20 miles farther to access inpatient care and more than 40 miles farther to access specialty care;²
- Americans in rural areas experience higher rates of chronic disease, suicide, maternal health complications, and more;³
- Only ten percent of our nation’s physicians and one percent of graduate medical education (GME) programs operate in rural communities, and⁴
- Two-thirds of federally defined health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) are in rural areas.⁵

Thankfully, our congressional colleagues and I have acted in recent years to help address this crisis. These efforts include creating a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) designation through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), passing incentives for states to expand

¹ “Unrelenting Pressure Pushes Rural Safety Net Crisis into Uncharted Territory,” Chartis, https://www.chartis.com/sites/default/files/documents/chartis_rural_study_pressure_pushes_rural_safety_net_crisis_into_uncharted_territory_feb_15_2024_fnl.pdf.

² “Why Health Care Is Harder to Access in Rural America,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, May 16, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/why-health-care-harder-access-rural-america>.

³ Munira Gunja, “Rural Americans Struggle with Medical Bills and Health Care Affordability,” The Commonwealth Fund, July 24, 2023, <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2023/rural-americans-struggle-medical-bills-and-health-care-affordability>.

⁴ Kelley Arredondo, Hilary Touchett, Sundas Khan, Matthew Vincenti, Bradley Watts, “Current Programs and Incentives to Overcome Rural Physician Shortages in the United States: A Narrative Review,” Journal of General Internal Medicine, June 20, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10356718/>.

⁵ Thomas Waldrop, Emily Gee, “How States Can Expand Health Care Access in Rural Communities,” Center for American Progress, February 9, 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/how-states-can-expand-health-care-access-in-rural-communities/>.

Medicaid, increasing funding for Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs, expanding Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), securing a once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's broadband to provide internet for all Americans, ensuring flexible telehealth opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more.

Unfortunately, our work is not done, and our constituents, especially those living in rural areas, are counting on us to protect health care access in their communities. As such, it is imperative that Congress uses the time remaining in this session to vote on a number of proposals to tackle this rural health care crisis. These bipartisan efforts generally fall under three categories – workforce, patient access, and provider flexibility and sustainability. Relevant legislation includes:

- **Workforce:**
 - H.R. 1202, the *Resident Education Deferred Interest Act*,
 - H.R. 2411, the *National Nursing Workforce Center Act*,
 - H.R. 2389, the *Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act*, and
 - H.R. 7002, the *Nurse Faculty Shortage Reduction Act*.
- **Patient access:**
 - H.R. 4758, the *Accelerating Kids' Access to Care Act*,
 - H.R. 6929, the *Affordable Connectivity Program Extension Act*,
 - H.R. 7599, the *Rural Emergency Hospital Adjustment Act*,
 - H.R. 8543, the *Ensuring Excellence in Mental Health Act*, and
 - H.R. 8702, the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act*.
- **Provider flexibility and sustainability:**
 - H.R. 2474, the *Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act*,
 - H.R. 2584, the *Safety From Violence for Healthcare Employees Act*,
 - H.R. 4942, the *Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act*,
 - H.R. 8260, the *Hospital Inpatient Services Modernization Act*.

While there are many pressing issues that deserve Congress' attention, we cannot delay further when it comes to rural health care. Our nation faces tens of thousands of unfilled nursing and physician positions over the next decade as the workforce continues to be exacerbated by various challenges.⁶⁷ It's also critical we address access issues faced by rural patients by funding the Affordable Connectivity Program and codifying permanent telehealth guidelines that are set to expire at the end of the year.

Rural health care is not and should not be a partisan issue. Each of the proposals noted above are supported by Members from both sides of the aisle and together would make significant improvements in our rural communities. I stand ready to work with you to ensure these bills see swift action in their relevant committees and on the House floor. Should you have any questions, please contact Eric Dunay (eric.dunay@mail.house.gov) in my office.

⁶ "Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet," American Association of Colleges of Nursing, <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/fact-sheets/nursing-shortage>.

⁷ "New AAMC Report Shows Continuing Projected Physician Shortage," Association of American Medical Colleges, March 21, 2024, <https://www.aamc.org/news/press-releases/new-aamc-report-shows-continuing-projected-physician-shortage>.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SD', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

Cc: Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Chairman Jason Smith, House Committee on Ways and Means
Chairman Jim Jordan, House Committee on the Judiciary
Chairwoman Virginia Foxx, House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Ranking Member Richard Neal, House Committee on Ways and Means
Ranking Member Jerry Nadler, House Committee on the Judiciary
Ranking Member Bobby Scott, House Committee on Education and the Workforce