

June 3, 2019

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives



Washington, D.C. 20515  
The Honorable Michael C. Burgess  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

On behalf of the more than 25,000 Oregon AFSCME Council 75 members, we ask that this letter be included in the official record for Subcommittee on Health June 4, 2019 hearing on “Investing in America’s Health Care.”

We strongly support H.R. 1767, the Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Act. This bill extends the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) program. On June 30, the CCBHCs in our state, along with those in Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, face extreme financial threat. We appreciate that you have worked together in bipartisan effort to avert the March 30 fiscal cliff in Oregon and Oklahoma. We ask that you, again, make sure CCBHCs continue to operate with full funding.

At Cascadia Behavioral Health, in Portland Oregon, AFSCME Council 75 members who are therapists, care coordinators, crisis counselors, residential counselors, support staff and other workers, deliver whole health care – integrated mental health and addiction services, primary care and housing – through the CCBHC program.

These health care workers never stop working to help those who want to get healthy and recover. It is not just a job, it’s a calling. This work matters because it means something to help someone who has experienced trauma find that they already possess the courage to move forward on his or her own terms. This work matters because helping a person manage diabetes and their depression means really seeing a whole person, not just conditions and symptoms. This work matters because it means something to help someone find his or her own resilience to recover after a relapse. This work matters because it means something when someone can find their way out of the addiction and sustain recovery. In fact, it means everything.

That core commitment to helping people heal is why Alexandra Birch, a Qualified Mental Health Associate, cares deeply about the CCBHC program. It has helped innovate and improve the delivery of care. She was hired in 2017 as a Care Coordinator

at Cascadia because of an investment Congress provided to the CCBHC program. In that role she is the glue that connects primary care with behavioral health care and makes sure care is focused on the whole-patient.

In her work, Ms. Birch treats clients with anxiety and very high blood pressure but who do not have an established doctor; she is able to connect them to a doctor. She cares for clients on certain anti-depressants that experienced weight gain as a result, which put them at higher risk of developing diabetes. Because of the investment Congress provided in establishing CCBHCs, Ms. Birch can direct those clients to in-house primary care to monitor and prevent diabetes.

For practitioners like Ms. Birch, Cascadia's capacity to bring primary care into the outpatient behavioral health care clinics is a game-changer. It enhances their delivery of services and outcomes for their clients. From the frontline perspective, the integration of behavioral health and primary care in a CCBHC removes logistical and other obstacles to consultation between providers. These consultations translate into improved identification of the best route of care for a client with complex physical and mental conditions with the result of getting a client on the road to wellness much quicker.

Cascadia's capacity to sustain and expand this level of high-quality coordinated care to a vulnerable population depends on the dedication and skills of workers like Ms. Birch and congressional action to continue investing in the CCBHC fiscal model that covers 100% of costs.

With the fiscal investment in CCBHCs, Congress allows Cascadia staff to reach into the community to expand access to behavioral health services for individuals with serious mental illnesses. Cascadia works with Portland's 24-hour mental health crisis emergency room, Unity Center Behavioral Health. Cascadia staff establish crisis patients with Cascadia primary care providers immediately after Unity hospital care. This enables patients to continue medications that ensure mental stability until they have fully connected with Cascadia's mental health providers.

We urge you to pass H.R. 1767 and extend the CCBHC program. It would be tragic to lose this funding that has sustained and expanded vital behavioral and medical services to our community.

Sincerely,  


Stacy Chamberlin  
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr., Chair, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
The Honorable Greg Walden, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce