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August 28, 2006

Randall L. Johnson, Chair  
Citizens' Health Care Working Group  
7201 Wisconsin Avenue Suite 575  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Community Health Care Association of New York State commends the Citizens' Health Care Working Group (CHCWG) on its efforts to include citizen input on improving access to quality health care for all Americans.

The Community Health Care Association of New York State, CHCANYS, is the statewide association of New York's community health centers. Our centers provide of a full range of primary, preventive and enabling services and serve as the "family doctor" for more than one million New Yorkers. They are located in medically underserved areas – urban and rural -- throughout the state and most health center patients – 71 percent -- have family incomes below the federal poverty level. In addition, 28.5 percent of health center patients have no health insurance.

The Working Group's Interim Recommendations are generally on target and we support the CHCWG's efforts to ensure these messages are heard by Congress. We strongly support the recommendation that coverage must be ensured for all. However, I am writing you today to express our deep concern regarding one aspect of the second proposal in the Interim Recommendations. Specifically, the recommendation to "expand and modify the FQHC concept to accommodate" other providers could remove or reduce the federally qualified health center community board requirement. This recommendation departs significantly from the goal of health centers of ensuring a community voice in the provision of services, and undermines existing patient democracies.

I participated, together with several other New York health center providers, in the Working Group meeting held in New York City on April 22. Modification of FQHC statutes was not a part of the discussion or recommendations made at this meeting. I am concerned about their inclusion when they were not addressed in the community meetings.

The Citizen's Working Group is an important avenue for American voices. As an advocate for community-based, high quality and affordable health care, I ask you to remove this recommendation and shift your support to build upon the successes of community-governed health centers by protecting their community boards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Swain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Elizabeth Swain  
Chief Executive Officer