

August 29, 2006
Randall L. Johnson, Chair
Citizens' Health Care Working Group
7201 Wisconsin Avenue Suite 575
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Hudson River HealthCare, Inc. (HRHCare) 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.

Hudson River HealthCare (HRHCare) is a not-for-profit, NY State licensed, community and migrant health center providing innovative programs and comprehensive services to medically underserved populations throughout southeastern NY State since 1975. In order to meet the growing needs of the region's uniquely diverse populations, the Health Center has expanded to include 13 primary care sites serving over 42,000 people through 186,000 visits annually throughout a nine county region. Special populations targeted by HRHCare include high-risk adolescents, multiply-challenged children, migrant farmworkers, pregnant women, persons with HIV/AIDS, new immigrant day laborers, residents of public housing, and homeless individuals and families.

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.

Our State Primary Care Association and New York health center providers participated in the Working Group meeting held in New York City on April 22. From what I understand, 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,

Anne K. Nolon, MPH
President & CEO