



April 10, 2024

Representative Wayne MacDonald, Chairman
House Health and Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 205-207
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: [SB 403](#) relative to health care workforce investments

Dear Chairman MacDonald and Members of the House Health, Human Services, and Elderly Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 403, relative to health care workforce investments. As the Chief Executive Officer of Coos County Family Health Services, I am pleased to offer input about SB 403, a bill that makes critical investments in New Hampshire's primary care workforce and that will help to ensure access to care for Granite Staters.

Coos County Family Health Services is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that has served North County residents for nearly 50 years. Our staff of approximately 160 individuals provides care for more than 12,000 patients. The organization offers a wide array of primary care, mental health, and dental services. We are the sole provider of primary care in the Berlin-Gorham region, and recently established a clinic serving the greater Colebrook area. Nearly half of our patients have incomes at or below 200% of the Federal poverty level, which is \$29,160 for a household of one.

Like elsewhere across New Hampshire, the North Country is experiencing unprecedented shortages in its health care workforce. More challenges lie ahead, as a significant percentage of the primary care workforce in our region is nearing retirement age. Additionally, the North Country ranks near the bottom in nearly all health outcome measures. Many of our communities experience higher than average rates of chronic disease, substance misuse, and behavioral health disorders, and have a rapidly growing number of frail older adults living alone in their homes.

We are working hard to address these challenges: We now employ community health workers to help patients address not only their health care needs but their social drivers of health as well. Our CHWs help people in the North Country find utility assistance, connect people with transportation services for medical appointments, and connect people with substance use disorder services, behavioral health services, and primary care services to help them thrive and age in home safely. Our CHWs have also been doing outreach to parents whose children have lost Medicaid coverage during the Medicaid unwind.

Community health workers across the state are largely supported by intermittent grant funding. It is difficult to support a workforce on grants because the funding can and does end. We do not have resources available to support this work without funding. SB 403 creates a voluntary certification for CHWs, which in turn creates a sustainable form of reimbursement through insurance reimbursement. This would go a long way to support this invaluable workforce.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Ken Gordon
Chief Executive Officer

Coos County Family Health Services