



May 25, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor-HHS-Education
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor-HHS-Education
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Blunt and Ranking Members Leahy and Murray,

On behalf of the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) and the 50 State Offices of Rural Health (SORH) we write to express our disappointment in the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 budget proposal for rural health. We respectfully ask that you reject the Trump budget proposal for rural health, and urge you to fund the SORH program at \$10.5 million which is slightly above the \$10 million Congress appropriated the SORH program in FY 2017. We also ask that you retain the Rural Hospital Flexibility Grants, which support the nation's rural health safety net of Critical Access Hospitals, clinics and ambulance services.

The President's budget calls for the elimination or drastically cutting the bulk of the rural health safety net programs. If acted upon, the president's budget would eliminate the 50 State Offices of Rural Health and Rural Hospital Flexibility Grants. This move would have a devastating impact on rural Americans who per capita, are older, sicker and less wealthy than average Americans.

In addition to the negative impact the Trump budget proposal would have on rural patients, the economic impact on rural communities could be equally devastating. Many rural hospitals and rural clinics are among the largest employers in their community. With one in three rural hospitals currently at risk of closure nationwide, the loss of State Offices of Rural Health or Rural Hospital Flexibility Grants would have a ripple effect throughout rural America.

SORHs are the connection to State and Federal resources for hospitals, thousands of rural health partners, and millions of people living and working in rural communities across the United States. State Offices of Rural Health collect and disseminate data which informs public policy decisions that impact rural providers, provide technical assistance that improves quality of care, aid in health care provider recruitment and workforce development, and work to expand access to life-saving health care services for rural populations. Last year alone, SORH provided technical assistance to over 22,000 clients in rural communities.

As you continue work on spending legislation for FY 2018, we encourage you to be mindful of the role SORH play in strengthening our nation's rural health and reject the president's budget request for SORH and Rural Hospital Flexibility Grants. We would also ask you support a funding level of \$10.5 million in the FY 2018 for the State Offices of Rural Health. The continued funding will build on the progress SORH have made as a rural health safety net and send a message to rural Americans that Congress is committed to their health and economic vitality. For any questions regarding our request, please feel free to contact me by email teryle@nosorh.org or phone (888) 391-7258 ext 107.

Sincerely,

Teryl Eisinger, MA
Executive Director