

Letter to the Secretary: September 24-26, 2008, Brainerd, Minnesota

October 28, 2008

The Honorable Michael M. Leavitt, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

I would like to share with you some of the highlights from our most recent field meeting in Brainerd, Minnesota from September 24-26, 2008. This was the second of the two yearly field meetings of the Committee, which provide an opportunity for members to speak with local rural health and human services experts, to inform the annual Report.

In Brainerd, the Committee learned how the 2009 Report topics of creating viable medical homes, workforce and community development, and serving at-risk children in rural areas are being addressed in rural Minnesota. The meeting was quite informative, with health and human service experts from across the State taking time to discuss the issues facing their communities with the Committee. The site visits afforded members a chance to visit rural communities and discuss the topics at a local level.

The Subcommittee working on medical homes visited Lakewood Health System in Staples, MN to learn about their Medical Home program. The Subcommittee was impressed that this initiative to implement a rural medical home was made possible by the dedication of a physician champion and the innovative leadership of a supportive administration and hospital board.

The Workforce and Community Development Subcommittee traveled to Crosby, MN to discuss creative workforce training programs at the Cuyuna Regional Medical Center as well as the relationship between the hospital and the local community. The Committee noted that this hospital was very active in creating partnerships, in order to generate the capacity to meet the needs of the local community.

The Serving At-Risk Children Subcommittee observed Early Childhood Family Programs at the Hillside School in Sauk Rapids, MN and met with representatives from a variety of programs for children and their families. Although the services, from early childhood education and home

visits to behavioral health assessments and domestic violence programs, are funded through separate programs, the representatives were able to connect families from one program to another in a seamless transition. The provision of multiple services for children as well as adult education under one roof was extremely beneficial for the entire family.

At each site visit, the Committee noted the importance of local leadership and ownership in creating partnerships. Partnerships enabled local leaders to maximize their limited rural resources and to leverage economies of scale, in order to provide their communities greater access to quality services. Findings from the field meeting and the site visits will be shared with you in the 2009 Report. The next Committee meeting will take place in Washington D.C. from February 18-20, 2009. Thank you again for your support of this Committee and your support of rural America.

Sincerely,

David M. Beasley
Chair