

Letter to the Secretary: June 14-16, 2010, Charleston, South Carolina

July 19, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

I would like to share with you highlights of the recent meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services from June 14-16, 2010 in Charleston, South Carolina.

The Committee conducted this meeting in order to gather information for its 2011 report that will focus on: childhood obesity in rural communities, rural early childhood development place-based initiatives, and the rural implications of health reform quality provisions. State officials and local providers were featured speakers at the meeting. The Committee also conducted site visits to three rural communities.

The Childhood Obesity in Rural Communities Subcommittee went to the small town of Walterboro, which is implementing the “Eat Smart, Move More” program. This program encourages more physical activity in the community, and offers nutrition education programs for the public schools. The Rural Early Childhood Development Place-Based Initiatives Subcommittee visited the Rural Mission on Johns Island to observe how this faith-based organization mobilizes community resources and volunteers to provide and sustain services such as child care, housing rehabilitation, and transportation for rural residents. The Rural Implications of Health Reform Quality Provisions Subcommittee traveled to Manning to visit Clarendon Health System, a rural hospital and health system that offers a broad range of primary and specialized care. The site visits play a key part of our annual report process as they allow the Committee an opportunity to gather local input on a range of rural health and human service issues.

I wish to raise two issues with you, on behalf of the Committee. We continue to be concerned about the ability of some rural providers to comply with the health information technology

meaningful use requirements mandated in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). We are hopeful the final rule governing these requirements will take into account the issues we have previously raised with you in our February letter and will incorporate more attainable steps for rural providers.

The Committee also remains concerned about access to affordable broadband technology for rural health care providers. We were encouraged that the ARRA funding to the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture provided a significant investment for broadband deployment in rural areas. However, the Federal Communication Commission's recently released National Broadband Plan still shows significant broadband gaps for rural health providers. We plan to send a letter of comment on the National Broadband Plan to the FCC Commissioners with details on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to share highlights from our recent meeting and to raise specific concerns. We would welcome having you, or your designee, join us for our next Committee meeting in Cedar Rapids, Iowa from September 15-17, 2010.

Sincerely,

David M. Beasley
Chair