



March 15, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Request for Federal Relief for Hospitals

Dear Speaker McCarthy:

We are writing, out of deep concern — as leaders of hospitals, as long-standing community servants, and as your constituents in California, to ask for your help to protect health care in our state. The care for millions of Californians is at risk.

In January, Madera Community Hospital in the Central Valley cared for its last patient. Dr. Jonathan Mayer, an OB-GYN who had cared for patients at the hospital, didn't mince words about the impact on the community: "If you have a car accident, you have to go to Fresno. If you have a heart attack or stroke, you've got to go to Fresno. If you're in labor, and there's a problem, you've got to go to Fresno or Merced ... Patients are going to die."

Some hospitals on more secure footing may not face closure, but are overflowing with patients who have no place else to go for care. And they are being forced to cut back on services offered to make ends meet as they face the same financial pressures that forced Madera Community Hospital to shut down.

Hospital closures and service cutbacks are happening because of huge losses sustained due to the pandemic, crippling inflationary increases — especially the cost of labor — and the severe underfunding of state and federal government programs: Medi-Cal and Medicare.

Dozens of California hospitals — many of which serve high numbers of Medicare and Medi-Cal patients — are at great risk due to the fact that Medicare pays just 75 cents for every dollar it costs to care for millions of California seniors. On the state side, California pays just 74 cents for every dollar it costs to provide care for Medi-Cal patients.

Failure to act now puts lives at risk.

As you consider budget priorities for this year, we ask that you:

- **Prioritize the protection of current levels of Medicare and Medicaid funding.**

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- **Create annual adjustments to Medicare reimbursement that keep pace with inflation (as suggested by MedPAC).**
- **Support training for the next generation of health care workers.**

In January, the nationally respected consulting firm Kaufman Hall affirmed the likelihood that in the coming months, even more hospitals will be forced to close or reduce services. This is a deeply troubling prospect for communities throughout California as hospital margins in the western United States were down 69% in 2022 compared to 2019. That’s the worst of any region in the country, and while talk of “margins” often carries overtones of Wall Street and profits, for hospitals they mean something quite different. Low or negative margins simply mean hospitals have inadequate resources for nurses, blood supplies, X-ray technicians, behavioral health specialists, and more.

Without help, cities and towns throughout the state are on track to lose vital community pillars of health care services and jobs: Visalia, Porterville, Hollister, Bakersfield, Humboldt County, all of Imperial County, pockets of Los Angeles serving our most vulnerable communities, and many more.

The crisis is not theoretical. It’s happening now, before our very eyes. What has transpired in Madera County will, without question, be replicated in other parts of California unless hospitals get relief. And once a hospital closes, it is incredibly difficult to reopen at all, let alone reopen with the same level of services that Californians need and deserve.

The time to act is now, before more Californians lose access to vital health care services.

Sincerely,

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