



51 Wells Ave Unit 4 Colchester, VT 05446 director@vtfreeclinics.org www.vtfreeclinics.org

Dear Senators Lyons and Kitchel,

As the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and Appropriations consider appropriations for initiatives related to health care, we would like to call attention to an appropriations recommendation made by the House Committee on Health Care that was omitted in the House-passed appropriations bill, H. 740. Specifically, House Health Care Committee recommended increasing the state funding that supports Vermont's Free and Referral Clinics (VFRC), formerly the Vermont Coalition of Clinics for the Uninsured, by ten percent. These nine clinics provide services free-of-charge to over 10,000 Vermonters across the state. This is a number we expect to increase as the federal Public Health Emergency ends and as a yet unknown number of individuals lose coverage through Medicaid. The clinics are supported by a \$1,028,000 grant through the Vermont Department of Health. We are asking that this grant, which is shared across the nine clinics, be increased by \$102,800.

This will be the fourth year that the grant has been level-funded, despite the clinics having faced increased financial pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, annually increasing numbers of patients, and workforce shortages. These clinics are a critical point of care for marginalized populations. They are also separate and distinct from the state's community health centers. VFRC's clinics serve as an entry point for accessing the broader health care system, often providing care until a patient is enrolled in insurance and able to be seen at a hospital or primary care practice. The free and referral clinics provide free medical, dental, and mental health services, as well as insurance enrollment assistance, free medications, case management/care coordination, and also connect patients with both medical homes and specialty care services. As such, they have an integral role in the health care system, including increasing access to and equity of care. An increase in the grant funding for the Vermont Free and Referral Clinics would support their efforts to maintain current services and remain an important safety net for Vermonters.

We are happy to provide additional details or answer question either verbally or in writing.

Thank you for your attention to this request,

Olivia Sharrow, MPH
Executive Director
Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics

Samantha Ball, MBA
Board Chair
Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics