

# **Community Health Center, Inc.**

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## **TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

**FEBRUARY 21, 2007**

**BY MARGARET FLINTER, APRN, VP AND CLINICAL DIRECTOR,  
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER, INC.**

### **IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED H.B. 6694, *An Act Increasing Funding for Health Care Professionals Under the Loan Repayment Program***

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Margaret Flinter; I am the Vice President and Clinical Director of the Community Health Center, Inc. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 6694, An Act Increasing Funding for Health Care Professionals Under the Loan Repayment Program.

It hardly seems possible that it has been almost twenty years since Dr. Carl Lecce and I testified before this very same committee in support of Connecticut's first loan repayment program for health professionals. We spoke then from the perspective of two clinicians who were alumni of the National Health Service Corps, I as a NHSC Scholar and Dr. Lecce as a NHSC Loan Repayment Recipient. We each had made community health centers, and the care of the underserved, our career and our focus. We knew the importance then of loan repayment programs in attracting the best candidates to serve in this setting. Twenty years later, that need is ever more urgent as healthcare professionals have assumed larger and larger amounts of debt in order to support their professional training.

The Connecticut legislature took a good first step when it created the Connecticut loan repayment program. Unfortunately, it always fell far short of the federal loan repayment program and that has disadvantaged from the start. That shortfall has gotten much worse. Today, a health professional who is awarded a federal loan repayment slot is eligible to receive \$25,000 in years I and II, and \$30,000 and \$35,000 in years III and IV for a total of \$115,000—and they receive a supplement to boot to help pay the income taxes on this income. Contrast this with our state loan repayment program which has, in fact, lowered the total amount of money that an individual could receive in a year to a maximum of \$15,000 per year for four years, to a total of \$60,000—all of it taxable, with no supplement to offset the tax burden.

The Loan Repayment Program is a critical element of our efforts to recruit and retain the best and the brightest—and the most compassionate and committed—healthcare professionals to our state. We offer them a tremendous opportunity to practice—but with it comes a state with one of the highest costs of living. This, coupled with the huge debt burdens these new clinicians carry, represent a major disincentive to select our practices.

Increasing the amount of funds a state of Connecticut Loan Repayment Program is eligible to receive to a level consistent with the federal program is an excellent strategy in recruiting the health professionals we want and need in our community health centers.

Thank you.