

Optimus Health Care Inc.  
Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Ludwig Spinelli, Chief Executive Officer

**TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
HEALTH & HOSPITALS  
FEBRUARY 18, 2010**

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ludwig Spinelli and I am the Chief Executive Officer of OPTIMUS HEALTH CARE, Inc, and a member of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut. I am requesting that you not approve the funding cuts to the "Community Health Center Services" line item in the Department of Public Health Agency Budget, which funds community health centers. Connecticut's Community Health Centers, also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers, are the true safety net providers in Connecticut. Federally Qualified Health Centers provide access to the highest quality of health care and social services to Connecticut's underserved populations, regardless of a person's ability to pay or insurance status. Every year in Connecticut, more than 263,000 residents receive their health care from Community Health Centers. Almost one third are uninsured. Community Health Centers serve as the "public option" in health care.

I realize the State has budget issues and needs to reduce spending, however reducing the ability of the FQHC's to provide medical, dental, & behavioral health care, will only serve to cost the CT taxpayers more when untold thousands arrive at the emergency department of their local hospital or else let minor diagnosis become more serious.

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At Optimus, funding the Department of Public Health allows us the opportunity to provide access to care to those most in need, especially those without health insurance, and new arrivals to the State whether or not they have citizenship. Optimus proudly served more than 43,000 unduplicated persons during 2009 and compiled more than 185,000 office visits. In Stamford, we have some 60% uninsured, much greater than in Bridgeport or Stratford where we have centers. Our locations often at times are the only place where a patient with HUSKY insurance can go for care and become their medical home. Governor Rell recognized the value of Federally Qualified Health Center's by allocating over \$25 million in bonding a few years ago. The bonding dollars allowed Federally Qualified Health Center's the opportunity to expand their medical capacity to serve more patients through numerous construction and information technology projects. The recent economic downturn this past year has greatly increased the demand for care at all sites, with thousands losing their jobs and unable to pay the high COBRA premiums. More than ever Connecticut residents are counting on health centers to be open longer hours, on weekends, and provide much needed medical care. A cut of \$2 million to the Community Health Services line item (a 33%) cut would be a dreadful setback to the Federally Qualified Health Centers who have spent the last couple of years building infrastructures, with bonding funds, to serve more patients, who need routine & preventive care.

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Another proposed cut that would be injurious to the public health of children would be the School Based Health Center Clinics line item in the Department Public Health budget. This program is operated by Federally Qualified Health Center's and other community providers in cooperation with local school districts in the areas with the greatest need and limited access to care. Nearly one year ago, Optimus & its partner health center, Southwest, took over the operation of 10 school based health clinics from the Bridgeport City Health Department. This school based health center model is one that works with a midlevel provider, a social worker, medical assistant and where possible a dental assistant or dentist. Children have immediate access to health care, including mental health, so they can better perform in school and reduce their number of sick days. Again, there are no restrictions for eligibility and we can help ensure the children receive the prescribed standards of care called for by the American Pediatric Association. The school based health centers are also an entry into the more comprehensive system of care that is available at local neighborhood health centers. Funding cuts to the School Based Health Center clinic line item by \$1.2 million will further devastate the much needed safety net for underserved families and children in Connecticut.

We cannot rely on further spending cuts in this budget. Dollars cut already outnumber revenues raised 3:1.<sup>1</sup> Because of the national recession, people's needs are going up

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<sup>1</sup> Budget passed in the fall had \$3 billion in cuts according to Sen. Pres. Don Williams and about \$1 billion in revenue increases.

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dramatically as the state's resources to meet those needs are falling. And spending cuts result in job losses.<sup>2</sup>

We need a balanced approach that addresses the state's structural revenue problem with a revenue solution. Specifically, we urge you to support the revenue options proposed by the Better Choices for Connecticut coalition, including closing corporate tax loopholes, evaluating corporate tax breaks to see whether CT is actually getting an economic return on its investment, delaying reductions in the estate tax, and increasing income taxes on households most able to pay.

In the current economic environment, when access to health care is a concern for many Connecticut residents, approving funding cuts to Federally Qualified Health Centers and School based Health Center is unacceptable.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on calculations of the impact of spending cuts by the national Center for Economic and Policy Research, [www.cepr.net](http://www.cepr.net), the spending cuts we have made cost us over 40,000 jobs.