

## **The Honorable Members of the United States Senate**

Dear Senators,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding recent discussions to eliminate or reduce funding assistance for Community Health Workers (CHWs), funding for the Center for CHW Excellence (CCHWE). As someone who has witnessed firsthand and who currently works in this CHW position, the essential role CHWs play in Appalachian communities, I urge you to reconsider this course of action and instead continue and expand support for this critical workforce.

CHWs are a lifeline in our rural, underserved regions. In Appalachia, where access to healthcare is often limited due to geographic, economic, and systemic barriers, CHWs bridge the gap between individuals and the services they desperately need. They not only help residents navigate the often-confusing medical system, but they also provide essential education, emotional support, and advocacy.

Their work is unique in that it is built on trust. Many of our residents are hesitant to engage with the formal medical system, whether due to past experiences, cultural divides, or lack of understanding. CHWs, as members of the communities they serve, can build strong relationships that help overcome these barriers. They guide individuals toward self-sufficiency, improve health literacy, and emphasize the importance of preventive care and routine checkups—often leading to early diagnoses and better long-term outcomes.

By connecting our residents with needed resources—from transportation to specialty care—CHWs promote equity and ensure that health disparities do not continue to grow. Their presence not only strengthens individual health outcomes but also fosters stronger relationships between our communities and the healthcare system overall.

Discontinuing funding would be a devastating setback. It would undo years of progress in improving access, education, and trust in rural health initiatives. I urge you to recognize the vital role CHWs play—not just as healthcare support, but as community advocates, educators, and connectors. Maintaining and increasing funding for CHWs is not just an investment in health—it is an investment in the future strength and resilience of Appalachia.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the health and well-being of all Americans.

Sincerely,

**Valarie Gunther, CHW, CDCA**