

November 20, 2020

Tom Morris  
Associate Administrator for Rural Health Policy  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
Federal Office of Rural Health Policy  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Associate Administrator Morris,

I write today in support of the Coplin Health Systems application for the Rural Health Care Services Outreach Program as it pertains to the Healthy Rural Hometown Initiative Tract. The proposed project, Food Access through Rural, Medical And Community sYstem (FARMACY), is an innovative and creative idea to expand food access in a state where physical and socioeconomic barriers can limit that access.

A diet that is rich in nutrients is a key component to a comprehensive health care plan. In West Virginia, a state that is chronically plagued by high levels of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, a healthy diet is particularly important. Coplin Health Systems is a nonprofit that works alongside those in the community to provide access to preventative and quality primary care services, as well as acute care services, regardless of one's ability to pay. This thoughtful mission leads them to aim to increase food access in Calhoun, Doddridge, Gilmer, Jackson, Ritchie, Wirt and Wood Counties, West Virginia through a FARMACY project. This project will aim to increase access to healthy, nutritious foods by working with local groups, such as food banks, to coordinate, and distribute food, increase access to nutrition based education, and provide expanded access to health care screenings.

Over 37 million Americans are food insecure, including over 11 million children. In West Virginia the number of food insecure individuals is 1 in 7, with 1 in 5 children struggling to access healthy food, according to Feeding America. The financial burden is substantial, with Feeding America estimating there were \$52.9 billion in healthcare costs across the country, directly associated with food insecurity. In West Virginia specifically, those estimates come to over \$327 million in healthcare costs, roughly \$177 per person. The annual healthcare costs for food-insecure adults are on average \$1,834 higher than those that are food-secure. This staggering number highlights the need to eliminate food insecurity in America.

Although rates of food insecurity have recently reached their lowest point in more than 20 years, the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reverse all those gains. According to Feeding America, nationally, more than 50 million people, including 18% of West Virginians, may experience food insecurity by the end of 2020, a number exacerbated by COVID-19. It is truly imperative that we elevate projects that work to increase food access to those that need it most.

With this grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, Coplin Health Systems will be able to continue its important work of providing key medical services in rural West Virginia, all while expanding access to healthy nutritious foods. I appreciate the opportunity to express my support for this application and for you allowing a full and fair review of the Coplin Health System's application. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator