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Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Subcommittee on Health

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2018

Secretary Lynn Gallagher
New Mexico Department of Health
Office of the Secretary
1190 South St. Francis Dr.
Suite N 4100
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Dear Secretary Gallagher:

New Mexicans in small towns across our state deserve access to affordable, high-quality behavioral health services. As you know, Tri-County Community Services is closing its doors on August 31, 2018. On September 1, 2018, patients who rely on Tri-County for behavioral health services will be left with nowhere to turn.

It takes decades to build a strong system of care in our largely rural, underserved state, where health care providers become vital to the fabric of a community. Tri-County provides high-quality mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatment–including medication assisted treatment, and many additional integral services. For patients who rely on mental health or substance use disorder treatment, few things are as important as the ability to regularly see a trusted provider focused on high-quality care. If the services provided by Tri-County are not replaced by September 1, over 50,000 New Mexicans in Taos, Colfax, and Union counties will lose access to behavioral health services. This is unacceptable. The state of New Mexico must act immediately to ensure these communities do not experience any lapse in services.

As we saw in 2013 when the New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) abruptly suspended Medicaid payments to 15 behavioral health providers, disrupting care to some of our state's most vulnerable residents will result in disastrous consequences statewide. During the 2013 behavioral health shakeup, I saw the negative effects that the state's decision had on New Mexico's most vulnerable residents, many of whom then relied on the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute (NMBHI) for care. During this time, the facility proved incapable of meeting the needs of the state. Unfortunately, the need for inpatient services has only grown since 2013. I am concerned that the closure of Tri-County will result in similar circumstance for NMBHI, similar to what we saw in 2013.

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Secretary Gallagher, what are you and your department doing to work with the state to advocate for the continuity of behavioral health care to the 1,300 vulnerable Northern New Mexicans, who currently rely on Tri-County Community Services?

Is NMBHI preparing to provide emergency services to this region of the state because of the closure?

Further, is the Department of Health willing to expedite Medicaid provider licensing in order to ensure more patients can continue to receive care from their current behavioral health providers?

Due to the urgency of this situation, please do respond by August 21, 2018.

Sincerely,

Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress