

United States Senate

March 15, 2023

The Honorable Chiquita Brooks-LaSure
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Administrator Brooks-LaSure:

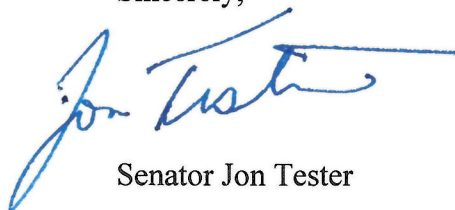
I write today to stress the importance of addressing physician shortages in rural communities and express my concerns about CMS's recent allotment of new residency slots. My family still farms in a rural, Montana community and I know first-hand how hard it can be to access health care. While our rural health facilities do the best they can to attract physicians, they face an enormous challenge to stay fully staffed. That's why I am deeply disappointed to learn that of the first 200 residency slots that CMS awarded as part of a new initiative to implement 1,000 new residencies, less than ten went to rural areas. The agency must address this imbalance before the next allocation.

Rural communities face a significant shortage of health care providers, and it is imperative that we take steps to address this issue. The Medicare-funded physician residency slots have the potential to make a significant difference in attracting and retaining the health care providers frontier communities in Montana desperately need. However, the under representation of rural placements in the first round of awarded slots is alarming and raises concerns that this initiative is missing the mark.

I understand the distribution formula for these awards allots 70 percent of the resident slots to hospitals located in States with resident-to-population ratios in the lowest 25 percent, yet so few placements were made in areas that can truly be deemed as underserved. If the cause of this imbalance is lack of rural applicants, the agency should consider additional outreach and innovative ways to support ideal applicants. Rural residents deserve access to quality health care, and residency programs play a critical role in developing the future health care workforce.

I strongly encourage CMS to take steps to examine the short-comings of the first round of this initiative and ensure that rural communities are represented in future rounds of awarded slots. I recognize CMS as an important partner in addressing the shortage of health care providers in rural areas and look forward to working together to ensure all folks have access to the quality care they deserve. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Senator Jon Tester