

**KATHY L. RAPP, MEMBER
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House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

January 6, 2026

Mehmet Oz, MD, MBA
Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Oz:

We are writing to you in our capacity as members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly who represent several rural counties in the northwest and northcentral parts of the Commonwealth. On January 5, 2026, Warren General Hospital (WGH), one of Pennsylvania's remaining independently operated hospitals, announced that effective January 13, 2026, the hospital will no longer offer inpatient labor and delivery services due to an OB/GYN shortage. Expecting mothers will be referred to one of three hospitals that are 20, 62, and 67 miles away, respectively, from WGH, one of which is in another state. Despite an extensive national recruitment search, WGH is unable to meet minimum staffing requirements to fully staff its labor and delivery unit. Unfortunately, the situation at WGH is not the only one that has occurred in Pennsylvania.

The OB/GYN shortage at WGH adds to the rapidly expanding maternity care desert in northwestern and northcentral Pennsylvania. In April 2025, UPMC Cole in Coudersport, PA, closed its maternity care unit. As a result, a seven-county and 111-mile maternity care desert formed impacting Cameron, Clarion, Clinton, Elk, Forest, McKean, and Potter Counties. According to the Pennsylvania Health Access Network, nearly half of the Commonwealth's 67 counties rely on only one hospital for maternity care while 21 counties have no hospitals with maternity care services. Pennsylvania's rural communities are in dire need of swift and direct intervention to remedy this critical maternal care loss.

This maternity care desert is driven by the state's health professional shortages. A recent survey from the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania found that 62 of the state's counties are considered "full" or "partial" health professional shortage areas for primary care. Vacancy rates for nursing support staff and registered nurses in rural hospitals were 28 percent and 26 percent, respectively, compared to 19 percent and 14 percent statewide. According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, access to hospital-based labor and delivery services in rural Pennsylvania has declined over the past decade, affecting both geographic access and the availability of

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maternity care providers. Longer travel distances, reduced availability of OB/GYNs, and limited prenatal and postnatal care resources present ongoing challenges for rural communities.

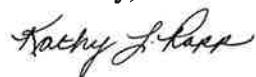
The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently awarded Pennsylvania nearly \$200 million as part of the Rural Health Transformation (RHT) Program. Pennsylvania's rural counties require immediate RHT Program funding to directly invest in workforce development, recruitment, and retention.

State and federal policymakers must act now to ensure that expecting mothers and babies in our rural communities have access to essential and life-saving health care. We are requesting that the funding approved by CMS be released as soon as possible so that Pennsylvania can look to address the statewide workforce development, recruitment, and retention issues facing our health care sector. The influx of this federal funding is urgently needed to address the situation described above as we continue to work with our fellow legislators to effectuate accompanying policies at the state level.

We recognize that direct funding to the states alone is not going to solve the nationwide shortage of healthcare professionals. Federal programs, such as the Conrad 30 program, that are often used by international medical graduates to pursue medical residency or fellowship training in the United States, need to be re-examined. As you are aware, the Conrad 30 program allows international medical graduates, who hold a J-1 visa, to apply for a waiver of the two-year residence requirement in their last year of training. In return, the physician must practice a total of three years in an approved Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or Medically Underserved Area (MUA) in Pennsylvania. Currently, each state is allowed to sponsor up to 30 physicians each year. For a state the size of Pennsylvania, and given the need for more physicians, 30 physicians do not go far enough to address some of the shortages facing the Commonwealth. Further, legislative action to increase the number of residency slots across the country needs to occur. Federal legislation, such as the bi-partisan Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act (HR 3890), would increase the number of available residency slots by 2,000 each year from 2026 through 2032. Perhaps more importantly, the bill would also make permanent the Rural Residency Planning and Development (RRPD) Program, which supports the creation of new rural training tracks to encourage physicians to practice in such areas of the country.

We thank you for your attention to this matter. We stand ready to assist the federal government in any way that we can to ensure the health and safety of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Kathy L. Rapp
State Representative
65th Legislative District

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Martin T. Causer

Martin T. Causer
State Representative
67th Legislative District

Scott E. Hutchinson

Scott E. Hutchinson
State Senator
21st Senatorial District

Enclosures

cc: Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Alina Czekai, Director, Office of Rural Health Transformation
Dave McCormick, United States Senator for PA
John Fetterman, United States Senator for PA
Glenn Thompson, United States Congressman PA-15
Brian Fitzpatrick, United States Congressman PA-1
Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Secretary, PA Department of Health
Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Secretary, PA Department of Human Services
Janice Walters, CEO, Pennsylvania Rural Health Redesign Center
Jesse Topper, Republican Leader, PA House of Representatives
Kim L. Ward, President Pro Tempore, PA Senate
Joe Pittman, Majority Leader, PA Senate
Michele Brooks, Majority Chair, PA Senate Health & Human Services Committee
Dan Frankel, Majority Chair, PA House Health Committee
Dan Grolemund, CEO, Warren General Hospital