

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2020

Mike Pence
Vice President
Office of the Vice President
Eisenhower Executive Office Bldg.
W Executive Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President,

Thank you for your dedicated work and leadership on fighting the coronavirus pandemic. As you continue to help answer this call, we write to share critical updates and concerns regarding response efforts from the provider community in Northwest Arkansas and throughout the Natural State. At the start of the pandemic, our hospitals quickly stepped up to provide coordinated care to ensure facilities were not overwhelmed. However, as the outbreak progressed, our state has faced a late increase in COVID-19 inpatients. The CARES Act provided much-needed support to facilities facing this situation, but we are deeply concerned that a recent surge in Arkansas and other parts of the country left them outside of the eligibility window for much needed funding from the Provider Relief Fund. We respectfully request that in working with Secretary Azar, you consider reopening the high-impact eligibility to account for the surges in cases in late June and July and expand eligibility when determining additional rounds of funding.

The first case of COVID-19 was admitted to an Arkansas hospital on March 11th, 2020. Within two days, every major provider in Arkansas was working to ensure adequate responses. One example is the three major medical centers in Northwest Arkansas—Mercy Hospital Northwest Arkansas, Northwest Health, and Washington Regional Medical Center—which adopted a collaborative strategy of resource sharing and demand balancing.

Starting in May, hospitalizations from COVID-19 in the region began increasing. By June 10th, hospitals in Northwest Arkansas had treated 206 COVID-19 inpatients. Between June 11th and July 20th, 484 new COVID-19 patients were admitted to the three major hospitals in Northwest Arkansas leading to a total of 690 COVID-19 inpatients in the region, an increase of 200%. The strategy between the major providers allowed the health system to manage the influx and not become overwhelmed.

While Congress provided financial assistance through emergency legislation, the efforts undertaken by the hospitals in parts of Arkansas have put them outside of the eligibility window for funds from the high-impact distributions. This has left our hardworking providers faced with undue financial burdens. As the Chair of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, we would like to work with you to address this matter. As this pandemic evolves, so should our policies.

Thank you for your tireless leadership, constant availability, and unwavering commitment to our frontline caregivers.

Sincerely,


John Boozman
U.S. Senator


Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator


Steve Womack
Member of Congress


French Hill
Member of Congress


Rick Crawford
Member of Congress


Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress