

June 23, 2020

Alex M. Azar  
Secretary  
United States Department of Health and  
Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW 200  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 445-G  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma:

The National Alliance of Safety-Net Hospitals (NASH) is most grateful for everything you are doing to help hospitals serve their communities during the current public health emergency. You have taken numerous actions that have made a real difference in our ability to do our jobs.

NASH appreciates your recognition that safety-net hospitals need targeted assistance from the CARES Act's Provider Relief Fund – the grants distributed recently were absolutely essential for the hospitals that received them – but we are concerned that these resources did not reach many safety-net hospitals: hospitals that care for large numbers of low-income patients and that are struggling greatly with both the medical and financial challenges the pandemic poses.

We believe this occurred because the criteria used to define “safety-net hospitals” did not capture far too many safety-net hospitals. For this reason, we request that you direct another round of Provider Relief Fund grants to safety-net hospitals and that you base eligibility for these grants on two factors: hospitals that are deemed DSH hospitals or those that are eligible to participate in the section 340B program. These two categories of hospitals most accurately and precisely capture safety-net hospitals that serve the highest proportions Medicaid patients and that most need these essential resources.

Safety-net hospitals have played the leading role in serving low-income and Medicaid patients with COVID-19 in communities across the country. Even as they have restored so many people to health, they have jeopardized their own financial health. They need assistance from the Provider Relief Fund, and the National Alliance of Safety-Net Hospitals urges you to direct grants to these hospitals, using the criteria we have described, and that you do so as soon as possible.

In addition, NASH ask you to extend the declaration of a public health emergency, which expires late next month. We do so first because we are still in the midst of the emergency and second, because many of the things safety-net hospitals and others are doing to support the response to COVID-19 have only been made possible because of the special flexibilities the administration and Congress have granted us in response to the current crisis. If the public health emergency were to end those flexibilities would end along with it, and there is too much work left to be done, too many COVID-19 patients left to serve, to let that happen now.

We appreciate your attention to our requests and everything you continue to do to empower private safety-net hospitals to help their communities through this crisis.

Sincerely,

Ellen J. Kugler  
Executive Director