

Murphy-Green Bill to Close Care Gap at Community Health Centers *Family Health Care Accessibility Act Encourages Physician Volunteers*

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Washington, D.C. — Congressman Gene Green (TX-29) and Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18) today re-introduced the Family Health Care Accessibility Act of 2013, a measure to break down the barriers to doctor volunteerism at community health centers (CHC).

Today, 1,100 federally funded community health centers serve 20 million people nationwide, but a workforce shortage is making it difficult for these clinics to care for everyone. Health care professionals want to volunteer, but federal law is making it difficult for them to do so.

If a physician, psychologist, dentist or other healthcare professional volunteers at a free clinic, they receive federal liability protections covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA). But if a physician wants to volunteer at a CHC, they must provide their own medical malpractice insurance, which can cost more than \$100,000. This is too costly for healthcare professionals, especially semi-retired ones, according to the Government Accountability Office.

This barrier is turning away otherwise qualified volunteers and creating a preventable shortage at CHCs. For example, CHCs had only 126 full-time equivalent volunteers, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Under the Murphy-Green bill, the federal government would extend to volunteer healthcare professionals at CHCs the same protection given to free clinic volunteers, who have been covered by the FTCA since passage of HIPAA in 1996. The Family Health Care Accessibility Act has received the endorsement of the National Association of Community Health Centers.

Rep. Green stated, "I am proud to join Rep. Murphy in introducing this important legislation. Extending medical malpractice insurance to health care providers who volunteer at community health centers will increase the quality of care by removing a major burden on this volunteer workforce. This protection has existed for volunteers at free clinics for years. It's time we harmonize this law for community health centers." "Community health centers provide a high-quality neighborhood medical home for low-income families and children," said **Rep. Murphy**. "Unfortunately, federal law is actively preventing doctors and other healthcare workers who want to help from volunteering their services at CHCs. This bill removes those barriers and helps to address a critical shortage of medical professionals so millions of Americans can get care at CHCs." A companion measure, S. 955, has been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

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