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June 7, 2007

Andy Jordan, MSPH, Chief
Shortage Designation Branch
Bureau of Health Professions
5600 Fisher Lane, PKLN/8C-26
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Chief Jordan:

I am writing in reference to a decision made by Valley Wide Health, one of Colorado's Federally Qualified Health Centers, to close its primary care clinic in Durango, Colorado. Valley Wide is the primary provider of adult care in Colorado's La Plata County, particularly for Medicare and Medicaid patients. I have heard from many concerned health care providers, citizens and state leaders who strongly believe that this decision will exacerbate the already stressed health care infrastructure in La Plata County.

I, too, am extremely concerned with this decision and believe that we should do everything possible at the federal level to help La Plata County in dealing with this health crisis. One way to do so is to designate La Plata County a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). This designation would greatly help the county in attracting a new health care provider, as well as additional health care professionals.

La Plata County's rural location has made it hard to recruit enough health care professionals to serve members of the community, especially low-income individuals and families. According to county data, there are 22 FTE primary care physicians in La Plata County and, out of those, only 3 are available to the low-income population. Because 30 percent of the county's population lives at incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, this means that only 3 FTE physicians are available to serve 13,447 low-income individuals – a population that will have even less access to health care services once Valley Wide closes its doors. An HPSA designation would go a long way toward helping the low-income community in La Plata County gain the access to essential health care services that they deserve.

It is with this in mind that I respectfully urge you to immediately designate La Plata County as an HPSA. If you any further have questions about the situation, please do not

hesitate to contact me, or my health care staff, Karen Howard or Ashley Wheeland at 202-224-5852.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "K" and "S".

Ken Salazar
Unites States Senator