

GREGORIO KHILICAMACHO SABIAN
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
BUSINESS MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
WILDLIFE, OCEANS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
NORTH AMERICAN AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, AND FISHeries
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 1, 2011

405 Constitution Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20515-2646
Tel: (202) 455-4400
Fax: (202) 455-4400
P.O. Box 504879
Suite 101, MP 96950
09701-23-2647
P.O. Box 1366
Rm. 101, MP 96950
09701-13-2647
Gregorio Khilicamacho Sabian
Tel: (202) 455-4400
Fax: (202) 455-4400
09701-13-2647
www.Sabian.house.gov
khh@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Eloy S. Inos
Acting Governor
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Caller Box 10007
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Governor Inos:

You must be as disappointed as I am to have learned that once again the Commonwealth has failed to apply successfully for grant funds to establish a Kagman Community Health Center.

I understand this is the fifth unsuccessful attempt; and it is especially disheartening given the \$80,000 planning grant that the Department of Public Health was able to obtain with my support in August 2009. My support was predicated on representations that the planning grant would be used to hire a consultant and grant writer with previous experience and success in applying for Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) funding, although this strategy may not have been followed once the grant was awarded.

Nevertheless, it is my hope that you will not give up in the attempt to establish a much-needed Community Health Center in the Northern Marianas and that you will consider other opportunities, such as certification of an FQHC Look-Alike, which can sometimes be a precursor to establishment of a full-fledged Federally Qualified Health Center. I also hope that the next time the Commonwealth submits an application for FQHC designation you will ask for a letter of congressional support, which could be of assistance in the highly competitive selection process as it was in obtaining the planning grant.

As you know, there are many benefits to winning designation as an FQHC. In addition to the up-to-\$650,000 start up grant, which the Commonwealth has been unable to obtain, the health centers receive enhanced Medicare reimbursement, are eligible to purchase drugs at reduced prices, and have access to primary health care professionals working under the auspices of the National Health Service Corps. Apart from the grant, these benefits are also available to an FQHC Look-Alike.

Most importantly, a community health center would increase access for preventive care in the Northern Marianas. As an indication of the need for greater availability of these services I note that the Northern Marianas currently has the lowest participation rate of any state or territory in the free preventive care for seniors and others on Medicare, which became available this year through the new health reform law, the Affordable Care Act. Nationally, 51.5% of those enrolled in traditional Medicare have received free preventive services so far, while in the

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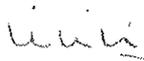
Marianas only 30.1% have; and just 2 of our 1,464 Medicare seniors have taken advantage of the free annual wellness visit the Affordable Care Act provides.¹

Making an FQHC the focus point for preventive care would also have the advantage of taking the pressure off the Commonwealth Health Center to provide these routine services. Instead CHC could more appropriately attend to acute care, such as dialysis. And, of course, the increased availability of preventive care, diabetes screening being a good example, would in turn lead to a reduced load on CHC. American Samoa and Guam have both reportedly seen this result. American Samoa now has three community health centers, and Guam has three and a dispensary. Indeed, even the Republic of Palau has a Federally Qualified Health Center. In each of these locations fewer people are coming into the emergency room for routine or preventive services, leaving the hospitals in these islands more resources for in-patient care.

The CNMI Department of Public Health has, or will have by September 30, notification regarding the unsuccessful application for FQHC funding. This will include a summary of the application's strengths and weaknesses as determined by the review committee. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) can also provide further technical assistance and feedback to Public Health on the application, which could prove useful in the next round of application. I understand, too, that an application packet for FQHC Look-Alikes is going out this month and that on October 3 interested organizations may apply online. Much of the application already submitted for an FQHC can be reused in seeking Look-Alike designation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress

cc: Honorable Benigno R. Fitial, Governor
Honorable Paul A. Manglona, President of the Senate
Honorable Eliceo D. Cabrera, Speaker of the House
Mr. Joseph K. P. Villagomez, Secretary of Health Services

¹ (http://www.cms.gov/newmedia/02_preventive.asp#topOfPage)