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LETTER TO THE EDITOR  
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## **Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: As Health Centers Break Barriers to Healthcare, Legislative Dysfunction Threatens Progress**

Louisiana found itself at a pivotal moment in history. After decades of being 50<sup>th</sup> and at the bottom of every important list of healthcare indicators, our state had momentum on its side. The Affordable Care Act, along with Gov. Edwards' decision to expand Medicaid, allowed for 470,000 working men and women to finally gain access to important primary care and preventive health services. We were certainly headed in the right direction.

Unfortunately, as has been the case throughout our state's history, signs of progress and a brighter future for healthcare have collided with Louisiana's political realities. Due to our endless stream of budget shortfalls, healthcare and higher education, both of which are so critically important to our state's future, continue to bear the brunt of our state's financial woes.

I can tell you that even amid endless political dysfunction and despite our Legislature's refusal to make healthcare a priority, Louisiana's 36 Community Health Center organizations remain strong and will continue to serve as our state's safety-net. They are resolute in their mission to provide healthcare access to every person who walks through their doors. With over 250 individual clinics across Louisiana, 385,000 patients now look to Community Health Centers when accessing primary care, dental, and behavioral health services. From New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport to rural communities in between, Community Health Centers have become indispensable medical homes for our state's most vulnerable populations – even working to create jobs and boost local economies. In fact, in 2016, Community Health Centers had a \$567 million impact on our state's economy.

While Community Health Centers primarily depend on federal funds for core operations, many patients depend on Louisiana's Medicaid program for insurance coverage. Therefore, steep cuts to Medicaid could have a destabilizing effect on health center operations.

As the state budget process moves forward, Community Health Centers and their patients are keeping a close eye on events at the Capitol. Health centers are proud of the role they continue to play in the health and well-being of communities across our state. But, if Louisiana ever wants to rise from the bottom in health outcomes, it will take the concerted effort of everyone involved – especially our elected officials.

We urge Gov. Edwards and members of the Louisiana Legislature to find compromise and work together, in the best interest of our state, to avoid devastating cuts to healthcare. Everyone, no matter their political party, deserves access to healthcare. It is time to leave partisan politics at the door. The solutions exist, our leaders simply need to find the courage to act - Louisiana's future and the health of its citizens are at stake.