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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

September 22, 2026

The Honorable Mehmet Oz
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Administrator Oz,

I want to start by thanking you and the Administration for all you have done to support rural communities through the implementation of the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). I was pleased to see Virginia was awarded \$189,544,888 dollars for Fiscal Year 2026 and look forward to seeing how this investment will contribute to rural healthcare access across the Commonwealth.

As you know, the RHTP was created in H.R. 1, which was signed into law on July 4, 2025. The program aims to achieve five strategic goals: Make Rural America Healthy Again, Sustainable Access, Workforce Development, Innovative Care, and Tech Innovation. The intended impact of the program was to improve healthcare access to members of rural communities who struggle or are unable to access adequate services otherwise.

It has come to my attention that much of my district's population is, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) definition, designated as non-rural. However, some of these localities should be available for RHTP funding given the presence of key healthcare partners in those areas. For example, Augusta County, located in the Sixth District of Virginia which I represent, was not designated as rural due to it being a "metropolitan county." While the county surrounds both Staunton and Waynesboro cities, much of the area is rural and underserved. It is also important to note that Virginia is unique in its structure which consists of 38 independent cities that operate apart from the surrounding counties. As such, any administrative systems within the counties are distinct from the cities. Augusta county contains Augusta Health, located in Fishersville, a town not far from Staunton that serves rural constituencies across Western Virginia. Lack of population density means many residents are classified as part of metropolitan areas despite facing significant challenges with both transportation infrastructure, lack of broadband access, and challenges native to living in the Shenandoah and Roanoke Valleys. These individuals, who already experience a lack of access to care and barriers due to geographic isolation, will now miss out on access to new regional rural health innovation networks and other exciting new transformations made available through this program.

Under the current guidelines, it is my understanding that there will be hindrances to access for some populations that the project was intended to serve. For this reason, I urge you to reconsider some of the non-rural designations made, taking into account cases such as Augusta County, and look into the feasibility of adjusting the definition of rural for years two to five of the program.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter and hope we can work together to address these concerns. Please know my office stands ready to help with regards to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Cline". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "B" and "C".

Ben Cline
Member of Congress