

February 10, 2021

To: Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee

From: Paul Klainer, MD, Founder, Board President, and Volunteer Medical Director since 1999

**Our Mission:** The Knox County Health Clinic believes everyone deserves access to quality care. We are a volunteer based 501c3 non-profit advocating for and providing free/low cost medical, dental, prescription assistance, mental health and wellness services to the uninsured and underinsured in Knox County, plus our border towns.

**Who Your Support Benefits:** Services are provided to uninsured and under-insured residents from 20 towns in and around Knox County and whose income is less than 200% of federal poverty guidelines, including MaineCare eligible children who are unable to access preventive dental services. Many patients are self-employed, or hold multiple part-time jobs that don't provide insurance. Due to closures related to the Covid19 pandemic, many recently unemployed are dealing with greater financial and social stressors. Throughout the pandemic, our team has made rapid changes to make our services safe and responsive, including investing in telehealth technology.

*From Hector: "I am over 50 and have not had health insurance. Knox County Clinic is the Hope for people like me, the Hope to find a positive answer when other options and/or resources have been exhausted. When all the doors were closed in an extremely serious situation...you are there with an open door. My thank you seems so small compared to all you have done, but it comes from my heart."*

**Why this Work is So Important:** The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the divide between those with a lifetime of easy access to preventative healthcare, and those who've struggled for access their whole lives, and often in devastating ways. The CDC reports that the people of any age who are most likely to die from the virus are those with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including: chronic lung disease, heart conditions, severe obesity, and diabetes. Many of these factors are preventable, but only if someone has access to affordable preventive medicine. We are the door that people can walk through, serving the people who are the glue of our communities, the center of extended families who depend on them.

*From Donna, who was paying over \$500 a month for her prescriptions. "You guys are miracle workers, I'm now paying less than \$100 a month! I didn't even have a car I've been so broke paying for my meds. Things were getting scary, but you're all life savers here at the Clinic!" Donna*

The Knox Clinic recently turned 20 years old, and continues to play a critical role in filling the inevitable gaps in our healthcare system. While Knox County has a Federally Qualified Health Center that could theoretically provide care on a sliding scale, it's located on the island of Vinalhaven, an hour's ferry ride away. There are no dentists in our area accepting patients on MaineCare, dooming today's children to life-long consequences. The CDC estimates that greater than \$6 billion is lost each year in America because of missed work related to poor dental health. There are also no local mental health agencies providing free or sliding scale counseling. According to a 2019 Gallop Poll, one in four U.S. adults were unable to pay for prescribed medicine in the last 12 months.

From a young woman provided with dentures: *“For many years I lived with bad teeth, and horrible pain from infection. I love working with the public and me being a social happy person it was embarrassing for me to smile. I was always hiding my smile with my hand, a napkin, anything so people would not notice the black spots and missing teeth that had fallen out. Since the day after I had my bad teeth removed, I have been enjoying smiling with my new teeth. I have so many thanks to every one of the absolutely amazing people who made this possible. ... Take pride in the work you all do. I take pride with what you all have done for me.”*

The spikes in Covid 19 cases over the winter, and potentially significant economic downturn has had destructive consequences for the working poor. This crisis reaffirms our mission statement - we believe everyone deserves access to care. We know that we must be available for our patients, even when others have closed their doors. When the economy suffers, our community suffers disproportionately, and this is when we are needed most.

From George, a patient since 2010: *“I’ve never had better care than at the Clinic. You got me to quit drinking and eat better. Now I try to ride my bicycle 15 miles a day. I lost 120 pounds!”*

For every patient we can help, whether we catch something serious like a blood clot, or improve their diabetes, or help them lose weight, that person becomes less likely to succumb to Covid 19. Each success story means there is a person who is now able to live a healthier, more productive life. The ripple effect this has in our community is tremendously valuable.

The Knox Clinic serves those who have nowhere else to go for care. Thank you for your consideration, your support will provide quality affordable care with dignity, transforming our community into one where people can care for themselves and their families.