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Dear Commissioners,

My name is Dian Palmer and I am the president of SEIU Local 73. We represent 28,000 primarily public sector workers across the state of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Nearly 1,800 of these members work for Cook County Health and 1,200 who work for various other County departments. I am writing today on their behalf to strongly encourage you to take advantage of the current opportunity to open more school-based health centers (SBHCs) throughout Cook County. The time to expand access to health care is now as the County and potential partners, such as municipalities and school districts, receive American Rescue Plan funds.

Last summer, when the Morton East SBHC was slated to be closed commissioners heard gripping and compelling testimony from patients, staff, and others impacted by this single clinic. In fact, our members at Morton East are reporting that even though students are not back full time, the demand for services is off the charts. Social services are completely booked out for weeks and they are applying for a grant to hire an additional social worker. And for the first time, CCH is actually advertising the clinic with signage in front of the school. Morton East is also a COVID vaccination site and are seeing a lot of members from the community.

With limited access to Cook County Health facilities in many underserved communities, these new SBHCs would be a pathway to improving health outcomes for those most in need. Skilled Cook County Health staff at SBHCs will be able to meet the medical health needs of adolescents living in care deserts and dealing with the repercussions of the pandemic. Additionally, SBHCs can address adolescent behavioral and mental health needs which help reduce violence in communities, disrupt the school to prison pipeline, improve academic outcomes, decrease emergency room use and hospitalization, and link adolescents with a medical home they may not already have.

Down in Springfield, Local 73 is fighting for an expansion of the IDPH grant program which augments SBHCs revenues across Illinois. I hope the Commissioners and Cook County Health will partner with us in these efforts and work tirelessly to track down newly available American Rescue Plan funds to invest in the health of the youngest and most in need at this critical time. As a healthcare professional myself I know having quality, accessible health care is one of the most important things we can offer our Cook County citizens. Please join me in making this a reality.

I thank you for your time commissioners and am available at any time to discuss this opportunity further.

Sincerely,

Dian Palmer
President

Dian Palmer
President

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Secretary-Treasurer

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