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**U.S. Representative**

***John Spratt***

South Carolina # 5th District

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**News Release**

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**Congress Approves Spratt's Funding Request for Sumter Family Health Center**

**WASHINGTON — Congress today approved \$935,000 in urgently needed funding for Tuomey Healthcare System's Sumter Family Health Center, according to U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC), who sought the money. Spratt said the federal funds may mean "financial salvation" to a clinic that provides "good medical care for people who badly need it."**

The \$935,000 earmark Spratt requested was included in a bill funding several federal departments and agencies. President Clinton has indicated he will sign the bill.

Tuomey's President and CEO Jay Cox praised Spratt for securing the funding. "John Spratt has come to our rescue," said Cox, "and to the rescue of thousands who depend on Sumter Family Health Center for health care."

Cox said Sumter Family Health Center runs at a "substantial loss that Tuomey cannot continue to cover." He said he hoped the funds will "bridge our operation until we can qualify as a federal health care clinic."

Founded by Tuomey in 1993, the facility provides low-income citizens with primary and urgent care, diagnostic screening and testing, pharmacy services, family planning, HIV coverage, and immunizations. Most of the center's patients do not have health insurance.

Last year, the center was overburdened when patient visits nearly doubled. It was then surprised by denial of its application for federal status and funding. The number of federal clinics is limited, and Tuomey did not make the selection.

In addition, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, which was providing primary care in obstetrics at the center, withdrew from the program, and the center assumed responsibility for its services. Patient visits handled by the center grew from 16,000 in 1998 to 30,000 in 1999.

The final blow came when the center learned that its application to be a “Federally Qualified Health Center,” which would include federal funding, was denied.

“I read the application,” said Spratt, “and I read the response from the Health Resources and Services Administration declining the application. The reasons given were not substantial, in fact, not even consistent.” The center was denied federal status because Richland Community Health Care contends that it draws patients from the same service area. Richland is based in Columbia, and its nearest clinic is an office in Eastover, across the Wateree River from Sumter County.

Cox said the facility will apply again. “This time,” he said, “our application will be twice as strong. We can show that patient visits have nearly doubled. We can also show that when Sumter and Richland officials met and compared records, Richland could show only 15 patient visits in the past year from Sumter’s service area.”

In the meantime, Congressmen Spratt and Clyburn sought a federal appropriation of \$935,000 for much needed relief to the center. “They were on the brink of closure, which would have been a tragedy. The center provides good care and covers a medically under-served area of Sumter County. There’s nothing else to fill the gap,” he said.

Despite extensive use of nurse practitioners and physician assistants to manage operating costs, the center posted deficits — \$800,000 in 1998 and \$850,000 in 1999. A \$950,000 deficit is projected this year. “Tuomey covered these deficits,” said Spratt, “but they’ve also borrowed heavily to rebuild their hospital, and they cannot keep absorbing losses of this magnitude.”

Spratt said he was pleased to help the center get out of a tight spot and hopes the next application for federal funding will be approved.

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