

## TAX REFORM COMMISSION

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Hello, I am Steven Miracle, CEO of Georgia Mountains Health. We are a Federally Qualified Health Center headquartered in and providing primary medical and dental services to the residents of Georgia. I would like to add my voice to those across the state who have spoken on behalf of reinstating the tax exemption provided to our organization and organizations like ours. My voice speaks on behalf of those who have difficulty accessing quality health care.

Georgia Mountains Health is a 501(c)3 charitable organization founded 26 years ago here in rural Fannin County. Our mission is to provide primary medical and dental care to those without insurance or who are underinsured. Our patients include the 54 year old man who lives in a one room shack in Gilmer County who works as a handyman, when he can find a job; the family of six, (Grandma, Mom and Dad, and three kids) who live in a trailer in Fannin County; the single mother of two living in Murray County who works part time cause she cannot find a full time job; and the family of a business man who owns a small business just down the road in Ellijay.

So the question is, where do these fine folks, our fellow citizens, obtain health care in an environment where the annual cost of group insurance is over \$12,000 for a family of four (State Employee Health Insurance Plan)? They receive care anywhere they want...provided they have the ability to pay.

At Georgia Mountains Health, many of these folks only pay \$20.00 per visit. You see, our organization employs full time Board Certified Physicians and other health professionals to take care of people regardless of their ability to pay. We charge a nominal fee for those living in poverty; in fact our services are discounted for all whose incomes are 200% of poverty or less. Of course we also encourage those with insurance to use their health coverage at our offices when they need health care.

In addition, we have a direct and indirect impact on the economy of our rural area. Our small non-profit organization provides full time employment to over 60 people in Fannin, Gilmer, and Murray Counties. Our budget includes salaries for providers, staff employees, supplies, rent and other expenses. We receive no direct funds from any local, county or state government. We do, however, receive support through an annual grant from the federal government.

Please indulge me while I share some statistics with you. This year we project having over 24,000 visits from patients who have no insurance or who are on Medicaid. This is an increase of 11% over last year. It is estimated that we will save the tax payer 30% for each Medicaid patient we treat. We have nearly 2,000 patients we are following and treating as part of our diabetes collaborative.

As an economic entity, it is estimated that we impact the local economy by over \$4,000,000. In addition, as documented in a study conducted by the MoreHouse School of Medicine, we reduce the financial pressure placed on our local hospital. Why is that? Because by providing a medical home to the underserved, we reduce the number of ER patients and inpatient admissions by people who have no insurance.

Georgia Mountains Health is not alone in providing services to the medically underserved residents of Georgia. We, and 26 other organizations operating in 137 locations, are part of a system of care. A system that gives us access to discounted goods and services, centralized computer hosting services, and other programs that help us operate as a low cost high quality provider of care.

I serve one the executive committee of this state wide organization, The Georgia Association for Primary Health Care, and I can assure you that we all have an open door for patients without insurance, or those with Medicaid, or those with Medicare....all patients regardless of ability to pay. Last year this affiliation of healthcare organizations provided over \$10,000,000 of uncompensated outpatient care.

The sales tax exemption is important as it can help us help the residents of Georgia. It can help pay for a clinical support person or part of a physician. It can help provide discounted flu shots to local businesses and school systems. It can help provide health screenings as we do in conjunction with Epworth United Methodist Church. It can help give free school supplies and sports physicals as we did for over 500 students this year. On a state wide basis the tax exemption provided \$500,000 in support of employment and programs like these. It is a small amount but it is big to us and to our community.

I appreciate the challenge you have before you to create a tax program that is fair to all Georgians. I would maintain that reinstating the tax exemption for Federally Qualified Health Centers such as ours is well worth the investment.