



May 16, 2025

On behalf of the Ohio Rural Health Association (ORHA), I write to express our deep concern regarding proposed federal rural health program cuts included in the leaked fiscal year (FY) 2026 President's Budget for the Department of Health and Human Services. The proposed budget recommends the elimination of critical, bipartisan rural health initiatives that support access to care in Ohio's rural communities. We urge you to reject these devastating cuts and fully fund the Department of Health and Human Services' rural health programs.

ORHA is a non-profit, member-driven organization that serves as a unified voice for rural health advocates across Ohio. *With over 600 members and contacts*, we bring together healthcare professionals, educators, public health experts, and community leaders to advance policy, education, and partnerships that strengthen health care delivery and equity in Ohio's rural areas.

The FY 2026 budget threatens to eliminate funding for programs housed in the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) programs that directly support rural provider sustainability, workforce development, and quality improvement. These cuts come at a time when nearly half of rural hospitals nationwide operate on negative margins. In Ohio alone, multiple rural hospitals are at risk of closure, and dozens more face significant financial pressures. Since 2010, 189 rural hospitals across the country have closed or ceased inpatient services. This is not the time to reduce essential federal support. **Rural lives depend upon access to care – without access, lives will be lost.**

The following FORHP programs are critical to rural health care in Ohio and must be preserved:

Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program (Flex)

Flex supports Ohio's Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) through funding for quality improvement, financial stability, emergency medical services (EMS) integration, and operational training. These resources help hospitals remain open and viable while improving care. Without Flex, many Ohio hospitals would be unable to sustain the services our communities rely on.

Small Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP)

SHIP provides Ohio's small, rural hospitals with funds to enhance patient safety, implement health IT, modernize billing systems, and prepare for value-based care. These improvements are essential in today's rapidly evolving healthcare environment. Loss of SHIP funding would stall Ohio's rural hospitals in outdated systems and compromise patient care.

State Office of Rural Health (SORH)

The Ohio Department of Health's State Office of Rural Health coordinates critical rural health programming across the state. It connects rural hospitals and clinics to federal, and state resources, administers Flex and SHIP, provides technical assistance, and fosters partnerships that drive improvements in rural care delivery.

Rural Residency Planning and Development Program (RRPD)

RRPD funding helps create and expand rural residency programs in Ohio. These programs are a proven pipeline for developing rural physicians in specialties that are urgently needed in our communities. In a state with many Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), investments in RRPD are vital to building a rural workforce equipped to meet the demands of underserved populations.

ORHA urges you to prioritize rural health care funding in the FY 2026 appropriations process. These programs are not just investments in hospitals—they are investments in the health and sustainability of Ohio's rural communities.

For questions or to discuss these programs further, please contact Rosanna Scott, Executive Director of the Ohio Rural Health Association, at executivedirector@ohioruralhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Beth Kluding

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