

Testimony of Yvonne Davis
Community Board Member, Health Care Partners of South Carolina, Inc.
Before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
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Room 430 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building

Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the invitation to speak to you today. This is a topic that I care deeply about, and I appreciate the chance to share my thoughts with you.

My name is Yvonne G. Davis of Florence, South Carolina. I've been a State employee for 28 years at Francis Marion University as the Resource & Acquisitions Coordinator for the library.

Today I'm here as a community health center patient, advocate and community board member. I've been a part of the community health center movement about 18 years now, as both a health center patient for 16 years and a community board member for 18 years at Health Care Partners of South Carolina, Inc. I have never been more excited for the world to witness and hear what community health centers are all about.

I come from a very small town about 45 miles north of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Communities there are close knit and family gatherings are still alive and well. My hometown at one time was booming with many jobs for the citizens of Marion as well as the connecting counties, and life was good. Then as years passed they all just seem to have disappeared; no jobs, no insurance, no unemployment benefits, means no health care.

Having the health center in our community has made it possible for people who have lost their jobs to still receive access to quality care, purchase medicine at a reduced price, and be educated about preventive measures they can take to live a normal and productive life.

You see, I've had allergy problems since I was a kid, and if any of you suffer from them, then you know where I'm coming from. It was our physician at the community health center who taught me how to live a more comfortable life during the high allergy season. I no longer felt like it was a waste of time to seek a physician's help when my eyes were always running and red all the time and I spent little or no time outside. What a difference it

makes when your doctor makes you feel as if he or she really cares. The service at my health center is excellent and I would recommend the center to any of my family members. My mother who at the time lived in St. Petersburg, Florida had a serious stroke and could no longer take care of herself; once we relocated her to the Carolina's, we immediately registered her as a patient at the health center.

She was diagnosed with several serious conditions: hypertension, renal failure, diabetes, congestive heart failure etc. This was a big adjustment for my family and we really didn't know what to expect. It was the assistance of the center's staff and other specialists that made life a little easier for us and we're so grateful. The quality of care she received was just unreal. If you can please my mother, then you must be doing something right.

But the real story is about my brother Dwayne. I remember so clearly the day when Dwayne, who is just 11 months older than me, was laid off from his job of 20+ years. Not only did he lose his job, but within a 16 month time frame, his only son was killed in a car accident, our oldest brother who was a disabled veteran died of medical problems, our mother had a stroke, and Dwayne's wife was diagnosed with a lung disease then later died. It was if he had no reason to live. Dwayne went into a state of depression like never before, and it was like we had lost another family member.

In August of 2007, I attended the National Association of Community Health Center's (NACHC) annual Community Health Institute conference in Dallas, Texas and had invited my brother Dwayne to travel with me just to get him away. For a life-long Dallas Cowboy fan to quickly turn me down was shocking. I immediately went to visit him and found him in a condition I couldn't believe. I promised myself and him that he was my candidate for take a love one to the doctor day, and I did just that.

After a complete examination and several tests the Doctor called me in and informed me that he thought my brother suffered a heart attack and the ambulance was on its way. What a shocker. I saw the look on his face from the news and knew that he was afraid. He was afraid for several reasons, one, because he didn't have any insurance and wasn't sure what would happen because he had no money. After completing applications for public assistance, patient care services, etc... he was finally admitted to the hospital then immediately put into the intensive care unit. A quadruple bypass operation was recommended after a series of tests. He had 96.5 % blockage.

After spending about 14 days in the hospital, we all know who ended up paying for that bill: yes, taxpayers. His excuse for not seeing a doctor earlier was after paying his utility and other bills he just didn't have the money. My brother is now sharing the information about the community health center with his friends that may be in the same shape he was in, and says to me, thank you. "That Health Center is alright with me", I didn't know they had it like that.

Since that time I've vowed to advocate for Community Health Centers because there are many more cases just like my brother's: people who, if they had access to the right care at the right time, could avoid the pain and cost of hospitalization. We truly are blessed to have access to a place like Health Care Partners in our community, and to receive the comprehensive care they provide, regardless of the ability to pay.

I would also like to speak a little about my role as a community board member. Volunteer consumer board members at my center make it a point to get out to church services, civic meetings and town functions and share information about the services provided by our community health center. We don't want anyone to go without care simply because they aren't aware of the health center. Funding constraints have limited our ability to advertise, but the good news is that there is no better advertisement than recommendations coming from community leaders that are now patients of the center. Because of the recession we're facing serious problems with providing coverage for the higher demand. Patients are constantly calling asking for more office hours. With your help we can make that happen. The need of our people is why we're here.

In thinking about an instance I am particularly proud of, I think one example is when one of the local high schools where we housed a school-based clinic saw their numbers of teenage pregnancy, STDs, and other conditions decrease during the time we were on campus. That time of being proud turned to disappointment when we could no longer provide these services within the school. There is an emergency call from the community for us to return, so we must.

I have witnessed the power of community health centers first hand as a patient and board member. I know that all across the country, America's Health Centers are ready to lead the way in health reform, providing high-

quality, affordable, accessible primary and preventive care to anyone in need.