

The Bulletin

By [Adam Benson](#) The Bulletin

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Courtney honored for effort to help United Community and Family Services

MOHEGAN - Over the course of his almost decade-long career in Washington, U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, has built many memories.

But none of them have topped the trip he took in 2013 to the health insurance enrollment center at United Community and Family Services.

"One of the most moving days of my time in Congress was being at the enrollment center in Norwich and seeing the reaction of people who hadn't been able to have health insurance for years," Courtney said Tuesday night at Mohegan Sun's Cabaret Theatre, where he was honored with the nonprofit's 10th annual Palmer Davies Leadership Award. "But at the end of the day, it's about delivery."

Tuesday's award ceremony came in the midst of a remarkable hot streak for the 138-year-old nonprofit. In August, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services tagged UCFS as a federally qualified health center, marking an eight-year journey that included three rounds of rejection.

Officials Tuesday credited Courtney with working hand-in-hand with local leaders and the agency to press forward with the designation, which puts UCFS on a new path toward financial stability.

"He and his staff did everything possible to help us," UCFS Chief Executive Officer Chuck Seeman said. They "worked tirelessly with us trying to obtain FQHC status and get hints about how to make our application stronger."

Courtney deflected much of the praise, acknowledging his staff and UCFS instead for its accomplishment.

"You never let the difficulty of the work you do stop you from staying focused on what you were trying to do," Courtney said. "When you're always going from one easy success to another, that's a wonderful thing, but it's not the true test of leadership."

The new federal status paves the way for \$1.1 million in funding over the next two years for UCFS that will be used to hire 24 full-time positions, allow for a 34 percent increase in clients and help pay for a new school-based health center at Montville High School.

UCFS will also be able to wipe \$200,000 in yearly expenses off its books in malpractice insurance costs, now being covered through the Federal Tort Claims Act.

UCFS became a federally qualified health center "look-alike" in 2002, which allowed it to seek enhanced reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid. It had tried three times over six years to shed its "look-alike" status.

That status meant UCFS had been unable to compete for capital and operating grants that have poured into the state over the last several years for Connecticut's 13 federally qualified health centers, which includes Generations in Willimantic.

Courtney has also provided UCFS leaders with a platform to tell their story, inviting administrators to the Capitol last week to testify in front of the newly formed Congressional Caucus on Primary Care, which he is co-chairman of.

"UCFS is going to now have a real national platform to tell your story and help create good policy, and that's a satisfying and exciting thing to watch," Courtney said. "A lot of people come up to me these days and say 'how can you stand it today to be in Congress?' But I have the most amazing district in Congress. That's what gets you ready to go in there and not surrender to negativity but every now and then you get to be a part of something special."

UCFS isn't the first entity of its type to recognize Courtney for his work in promoting more affordable health care. In 2014, the National Association of Community Health Centers gave him its Distinguished Community Health Defender Award.



MOHEGAN 10-13-2015 U. S. Representative Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, talks with Chuck Seeman, center, president/Chief Executive Officer of United Community Family Services and Jennifer Granger, UCFS Chief Operating Officer Tuesday before Courtney was honored with the Palmer Davies Leadership Award at the Mohegan Sun Cabaret Theatre. See videos and more photos at [NorwichBulletin.com](#) John Shishmanian/ [NorwichBulletin.com](#)

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