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Print Page

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## UCFS leader testifies in Washington on role of community health centers

After finally winning support from Washington in its bid to become a federally qualified health center, United Community and Family Services returned the favor Thursday.

Jennifer Granger, UCFS's chief operating officer and soon-to-be CEO, joined medical director Ramindra Walia on Capitol Hill Thursday to testify at the launch of the Congressional Caucus on Primary Care.

The bipartisan panel is led by Republican David Rouzer, of North Carolina, and U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2<sup>nd</sup> District.

"Specifically with increased enrollment and people insured through the Affordable Care Act and really needing access to primary care, the stories are the same whether it's rural southeastern North Carolina or Southeastern Connecticut," Granger said from Washington, D.C., after her remarks. "We're really one of thousands."

Granger was part of a team that traveled to Washington for a two-day orientation as a new critical care access point. By coincidence, Rouzer and Courtney scheduled the caucus's launch for Thursday, and he invited Granger and Walia to help christen it.

On Aug. 11, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted the Norwich-based nonprofit full status as a federally qualified health center, paving the way for \$1.1 million in funding over the next two years 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.

"Increasing access to primary care is one of the best ways to promote better health outcomes and control costs," Courtney said in a statement. "I am looking forward to promoting health care policy that recognizes and capitalizes on the importance of primary care in under-served areas, and works to strengthen our primary care workforce nationwide."

On Tuesday, Courtney will receive UCFS's Palmer Davies award for his work helping it to attain federal status.

Granger said she was excited to share the national stage with other primary health care providers.

"There are 1,300 centers across the country doing work similar to ours and providing that critical medical home to so many," she said. "I think it's a great testament to Joe's value that he places on primary care and his commitment to UCFS specifically that we were the first call he made."

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Print Page