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UCFS seeks funds to expand facility in Jewett City

JEWETT CITY — Six years into United Community and Family Service's Jewett City tenancy, the Main Street health center is bursting at the seams.

Sixteen legislators from across the region signed a letter to Jewell Mullen, commissioner of the state Department of Public Health, in support of a request for bonding funds to build a new UCFS facility in Griswold.

The bonding request is part of the nonprofit healthcare provider's \$5.2 million proposal for the state public health department's Capacity-Building Grant.

Pamela Kinder, UCFS vice president of marketing and facilities, said visits to the Jewett City facility increased by 157.9 percent and the list of clients grew by 87.3 percent from 2009 to 2013. The center opened its doors in February 2008.

The first responsibility Vice President of Planning Nancy Cowser was given when she joined the health care center's staff was opening the Jewett City site. "The minute we moved in, we outgrew it," she said.

Now, Cowser is looking forward to another opening in town. Four possible sites in Jewett City and Griswold — all meeting the health center's requirement of being on a bus line — have been identified and the building design has been drafted, Cowser said. All they're waiting for is the funding.

UCFS has no access to federal funds supporting capital development or operation because it has not been recognized yet through the federal grant process. Instead, the organization is considered a federally qualified health center "look-alike." Cowser said U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney has been championing the effort to get federal recognition for the health center.

Cowser said a grant proposal to purchase land for the project has been submitted at the state level through Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management. She said she expects to hear a response to that proposal, as well as the one submitted for the department of public health's capacity building grant, within the next couple of weeks.

In their letter to Mullin, legislators cited the Jewett City health center as the only provider in the community serving uninsured patients on a sliding fee scale as well as the only one to accept public insurance.

The letter also noted the new facility would free up space at Norwich's UCFS health center, particularly for dental visits, while giving Plainfield UCFS patients a closer option for dental care.

By the numbers

A proposal for a new United Community and Family Services site in Griswold would making room for:

n 1,200 new medical and women's health patients

n 1,500 new dental patients

n 124 new behavioral health patients

n 20 new permanent health-care jobs

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