

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 23, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Becerra and Secretary Vilsack,

On October 22, 2020, during the height of the pandemic, financial hardship forced Southwest Georgia Regional Medical Center in Cuthbert, Georgia to close. This was, and is, unacceptable. It is vital that we reopen the hospital in Cuthbert so these Georgians can access life-saving medical care, and I'm writing you today to ask for your agency's full complete support to help me get that done.

Georgia has lost 9 rural hospitals since 2010.

The closure of this hospital, like the others, was avoidable, and it demonstrates the continued struggles rural communities in Georgia and across the country face in accessing health care — only made worse during this pandemic.

When I visited Cuthbert in December 2020, I met with community members and heard horror stories about an inability to access basic care. This included the story of one resident who had to drive her brother an hour each way to a hospital in Columbus three days a week just to access life-saving treatment. In 2020, in the United States of America. Unacceptable.

In announcing the hospital's closure, its former CEO said it simply could not secure the funding necessary to make critical facility improvements. The entire community, including Cuthbert Mayor Steve Whatley, the Randolph County Hospital Authority, and Southwest Georgia Regional Medical Center, worked tirelessly to try and secure funds, but COVID-19 only worsened the financial strain.

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING,
AND URBAN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

CHAIR, PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INVESTIGATIONS

OSSOFF.SENATE.GOV

Health care is a human right, and to make that a reality for all Georgians they must have reasonable access to care. I urge you to make every Federal resource swiftly available to reopen this hospital facility, including Federal funding to address the hospital's infrastructure needs. I would ask that you work personally with me, my staff, Mayor Whatley, and the surrounding community to see it through.

I'd also invite you to visit Cuthbert with me to tour the facility and meet with community leaders who have been on the frontlines of this effort.

It is of utmost importance that the federal government help provide support to this rural community, especially as our country and state continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Ossoff", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Ossoff
United States Senator