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## COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS AND BI-STATE TESTIFY BEFORE VERMONT HOUSE HEALTH COMMITTEE

MONTPELIER, VT – Feb. 14, 2014 – With 12 leaders from the Federally Qualified Health Centers, the Vermont Coalition of Clinics for the Uninsured, Gifford Health Center, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England; Bi-State's director of VT Public Policy, Susan Barrett, and Executive Director Tess Stack Kuenning, spent the day at the VT State House on Feb. 14 to testify and hold meetings with state officials on the matter of health care access and cost savings.



*Speaker of the House Shap Smith (center) poses with Community Health Center leaders and board members, Bi-State staff, and John Olson, Chief, State Office of Rural Health & Primary Care. (L-R). John Olson, Grant Whitmer, Elizabeth Becken, Jack Donnelly, Nick Carter, Pam Parson, Marcia Perry, John Edwards, Shap Smith, Tess Stack Kuenning, Renee Kilroy, Martha Hanlon, Stephanie Pagliuca, Susan Barrett, Kevin Kelley, and Wilda Pelton.*

In the House Health Care Committee meeting, they demonstrated how FQHCs reduce costly emergency room visits by making primary care office visits available to their patients in the evening and on weekends. The committee heard why funding loan repayment programs and workforce initiatives is necessary to recruit primary care doctors and clinicians to Vermont. Legislators took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions about the "primary care infrastructure" and expressed support for greater access to primary care.

In meetings with Senate Pro Tempore John Campbell and Speaker of the House Shap Smith, Bi-State and its members agreed with the legislators that there is a tremendous need for easier access to mental health services. Several of the health centers currently integrate mental and behavioral health services within their practices, along with medical and oral health care. Many suggested that the ease of access through a familiar primary care setting was ideal for patients. Bi-State members urged collaboration and funding to expand access.

Robin Lunge, Director of Payment Reform for the Administration, provided the group with an update on payment reform to Bi-State and its members about the state's health benefits exchange (VT Health Connect), cost-sharing assistance proposals for those entering the exchange, and plans for a single-payer system in Vermont.

Following testimony and meetings, Bi-State's annual Reception for Vermont Legislators was held from 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the State House Cafeteria.

Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving Vermont and New Hampshire, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization that works with federal, state, and regional health policy organizations, foundations, and payers to develop strategies, policies, and programs that provide and support community-based primary health care services in medically underserved areas.