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**Community Health Centers Advocate to Extend Medicaid Coverage for Pregnant Women to a Full Year Post-Partum**

Madison, WI – At today’s Senate Committee on Insurance, Licensing, and Forestry hearing, Community Health Center advocates offered testimony in support of Senate Bill 562 (SB 562). The bipartisan bill, championed this session by Senator Ballweg and Representative Loudenberg, would extend Medicaid coverage for pregnant women from 60 days to a full year post-partum, adding coverage for an estimated 6,300 Wisconsinites.

Women need a range of health care services following the birth of a child, especially as many pre-existing chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes can worsen with pregnancy. 30% of maternal deaths (excluding suicide and drug overdose) occur between 43 days and 365 days following delivery. Pregnancy-related mortality for black women is five times higher than for white women, and Latino women are three times more likely to die than white women. As providers of safety net services, 55% of Community Health Center patients are Medicaid enrollees. This bill would increase Community Health Centers’ ability to provide continued, coordinated care for individuals at a critical juncture in their care.

Steve Smith, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Community Health Systems Inc., a Community Health Center serving the Beloit area, advocated, “We have seen, particularly in this last year and a half, that not having coverage almost always results in hesitancy to seek medical, dental or behavioral care and certainly acts as a barrier to receiving higher level or specialized services. Ongoing, stable support that creates equitable access to care, particularly during the first year postpartum is important and we firmly believe that an extension of this timeframe for coverage is critical for this population.”

Laura Anderson, a provider at Community Health Services, Inc., also shared her experience treating mothers and babies. “As a new mom, so many changes are happening, both physically and mentally. The care we’re able to provide is limited if a woman’s coverage ends; it creates gaps and threatens continuity of care at a very vulnerable time. Extending Medicaid to the first year following delivery provides assurance that needed medications, counseling, and medical care are available when they are needed. It provides the resources to make sure a baby can be raised by a healthy parent and assures a solid foundation for this family unit to safely manage the complex challenges of the first year of life.”

SB 562 was introduced on September 15, 2021, with bipartisan support from 27 state lawmakers. The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) represents all 17 of Wisconsin’s Federally Qualified Health Centers and is a long-time supporter of extending Medicaid coverage for pregnant women to a full year post-partum.

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