

**For immediate release**

*Editor's note: document attached*

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**Elizabethtown Community Hospital CEO Develops Proposal to Congress**  
*Plan aims to secure VA Clinics located in rural areas of the nation*

**Elizabethtown, N.Y. (February 26, 2010)** – Elizabethtown Community Hospital's CEO and Administrator Rod Boula has developed a proposal that will allow the nation's VA Clinics to remain viable in the most rural areas of the nation.

The proposal has been delivered to Congressman Bill Owens for review.

The proposal calls for the cooperation of three federal programs – Critical Access Hospitals (CAH), Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and the Veterans' Administration (VA) – allowing veterans the ability to access any of their local healthcare facilities designated as a CAH or FQHC for primary care. Currently, there are 1,300 CAHs and 1,100 FQHCs across the nation, typically located in the most rural areas.

Boula's proposal suggests that these three entities utilize the federally-instituted services currently in place for the delivery of primary healthcare to veterans.

Critical Access Hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers were instituted by the federal government to ensure viability of rurally-based hospitals and clinics. The federal government reimburses these hospitals and clinics, using a cost-based system, through Medicare and Medicaid. Before these designations were developed, it was necessary for these smaller, rurally-located hospitals to spread fixed costs over a lower number of emergency room visits and inpatient admissions than their larger counterparts, driving up fees. The CAH designation allows these hospitals to be reimbursed at a slightly higher rate, to offset the cost of providing healthcare services within the smaller communities.

This ultimately allows small hospitals and clinics to continue operations in the most rural areas. Without CAHs and FQHCs, those who live in rural areas of our nation would often have to travel for hundreds of miles to receive basic healthcare.

Rod Boula states that the plan's simplicity is what makes it so attractive. "CAHs and FQHCs were both established by the federal government; and the Veterans' Administration is a federally-established entity", he said. "It simply makes sense for a federal organization (the VA) to take advantage of these federally-established programs to improve access and provide continuity of care to our veterans."

Since this is a new concept, Boula is hoping that the plan will be put into place in the Northeast, as a pilot program; and ultimately instituted throughout the nation.

### **About Elizabethtown Community Hospital**

Elizabethtown Community Hospital (ECH) is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital primarily serving local communities that are home to over 30,000 full-time residents, along with thousands of tourists and seasonal residents.

Elizabethtown Community Hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission and is licensed and certified by the New York State Department of Health and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. ECH received its Critical Access Hospital status in 1997.