**MEDIA ALERT**

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**\* \* \*GREAT PHOTO/VIDEO/INTERVIEW AVAILABILITY\* \* \***

**CONGRESSMAN BILIRAKIS TO HOST PRESS CONFERENCE WITH PREMIER COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE TO COMBAT OPIOID CRISIS IN PASCO**

*Press conference will take place on Monday, Sept. 24 at 2 p.m.*

**DADE CITY, Fla., Friday, September 21, 2018** – On **September 19 with the advocacy efforts of Congressman Gus Bilirakis**, Premier Community HealthCare (Premier) was awarded $285,000 in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to combat the opioid crisis in Pasco County. Of these funds, $110,000 will be used to hire personnel and $175,000 will be allocated for renovation of facilities at Premier’s substance abuse/mental health treatment center in Zephyrhills.

Last year, Premier provided access to medical, dental and behavioral healthcare and support services for over 31,500 patients throughout its 10 community-based clinics. Of those served, 45% were uninsured. Behavioral health services have been provided by Premier since 1989 with two licensed clinical social workers and expanded in 1996 through the Gulfcoast Area Health Education Center with psychiatry residents from the University of South Florida. Additional service expansions occurred over the next two decades resulting in additional providers and support staff to help meet the growing demand for services.

“Addiction has ravaged families and communities across the nation, including here at home. This is an issue I’ve been working on for many years, fighting for more federal funding to ensure better access to treatment and for common sense policies that keep drugs off our streets and allows law enforcement to crack down on those seeking to exploit patients. Locally, we know that access to treatment continues to be a primary and persistent barrier to saving lives and get people the help they need to fully recover. Community health centers, which offer high quality primary care, mental health and dental services to patients on a sliding scale basis, are a natural fit to help augment the work of existing providers, whereby expanding access for the uninsured, underinsured and insured. I’ve always championed the community health center model, and frankly expanding the scope of service to include substance abuse treatment is a no-brainer as far as I am concerned, which is why I was happy to push for these funds. In total, I have helped secure $5 billion to fight addiction since 2017, with over $103 million dollars coming to the state of Florida in the past 13 months. Approximately, $3 billion of the funds we have authorized have yet to be allocated, and I will work hard to ensure Florida receives its fair share of these remaining dollars,” said Congressman Gus Bilirakis, U.S. Representative for Florida's 12th congressional district.

The funding for Premier will specifically be used to increase behavioral health personnel enabling Premier to help improve access to care and renovate a larger facility to house behavioral health services in Zephyrhills, explained Joey Resnick, CEO of Premier.

Overall, HHS and HRSA awarded over $396 million to combat the opioid crisis. Of that total, HRSA awarded $352 million to increase access to substance use disorder and mental health services through the *Expanding Access to Quality Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Services (SUD-MH)* to 1,232 community health centers across the nation. The SUD-MH awards support health centers in implementing and advancing evidence-based strategies that best meet the substance use disorder and mental health needs of the populations they serve.

For a list of Fiscal Year 2018 SUD-MH Awards recipients, visit: [View a list of the SUD-MH award recipients](https://bphc.hrsa.gov/programopportunities/fundingopportunities/sud-mh/fy2018awards/index.html)

For more information about Premier Community HealthCare and its mission, visit [www.premierhc.org](http://www.premierhc.org).

**WHO:** Congressman Gus Bilirakis and Premier Community HealthCare

**WHAT:** A press conference with state and local leaders to discuss how this newest funding aligns with the community’s targeted approach to solving substance abuse and the opioid crisis

**WHEN:** Monday, Sept. 24

2 – 3 p.m.

**WHERE:** Pasco County Emergency Operations Center Media Room

8744 Government Drive, Bldg. A

New Port Richey, FL 34654

**VISUALS:** Photography and video will be permitted to members of the media. To

schedule interviews, contact Cheryl Pollock at 352-518-2000 ext. 9012 or

CPollock@HCNetwork.org.

*Premier Community HealthCare Group is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that operates Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC’s) dedicated to providing accessible healthcare for all. Officially known as Premier Community HealthCare Group, Inc. (Premier), the organization is a non-profit community health center dedicated to providing high quality, affordable, accessible medical care to the medically underserved. With ten conveniently located offices throughout Pasco and Hernando Counties to serve patients, Premier provides a full range of comprehensive primary care medical services that include family medicine, pediatrics, dental, behavioral health, obstetrics and gynecology. Premier has been committed to improving access to care for everyone with its long-standing presence in the community since 1979.*

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