

Dear Senator Whitehouse,

I am writing you to bring to your attention some very upsetting news that I learned of recently regarding the cancelation of the RI Mission of Mercy Free Dental Clinic (RI MOM) at CCRI's Flanagan Campus.

I am sure you are familiar with the event but if not, it is the one that alleviates pain and gives new smiles to hundreds of vulnerable Rhode Islanders. The one that restores their dignity and self-worth. The one that puts a face on the systemic failures of the health care system and gets the attention of legislators who visit every year. The one that saw over 600 volunteers join with community partners to change talk into action and help their fellow citizens in need for 5 years.

After five years of inarguable success, the new CCRI president, Dr. Meghan Hughes, has decided to no longer allow the RI MOM free dental clinic to take place at the college. In doing so, she has given no valid explanation for the termination of this precious resource for our state's working poor who line up every year at dawn for care.

Good oral health is critical to an individual's overall health and well-being. It includes the prevention or elimination of diseases such as tooth decay, gum disease, and oral and pharyngeal cancers. Untreated, these diseases are progressive and grow more complex over time, often requiring emergency room visits which do not address the underlying dental problem.

For 5 years over 3,000 dental, medical and committee volunteers came together to provide free dental services to the uninsured, underinsured or anyone who was unable to access dental care. In those five years over 4,000 patients received critical oral health that they may have otherwise gone without.

I strongly urge you to support the RI MOM continuing at CCRI.

Sincerely,