

City of Racine: Special session legislation would fund permanent home for Racine Community Health Clinic and community center

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City of Racine - On Wednesday of this week, Governor Evers introduced Special Session legislation to expand access to health care for many Wisconsinites and also fund specific projects in communities around the state. The legislation specifically allocates \$53 million to Racine to build a permanent home for the Racine Community Health Center (RCHC) which will be combined with a new community center.

A priority of Mayor Mason's since first taking office has been addressing the healthcare disparities that exist within the City. Racine is the largest City in the Midwest without a federally qualified health clinic (FQHC) and many City residents do not have access to healthcare. Since 2019, the City has partnered with the Racine Unified School District (RUSD), Racine County, Gateway Technical College, Ascension, and others to establish the Racine Community Health Center (RCHC) in the City's Lincoln-King neighborhood. With financial support from community partners, including million dollar contributions from RUSD and Ascension, the clinic space has been constructed and the Racine Community Health Center is on track to open in the garden level of Julian Thomas Elementary School later this summer. Once open, the RCHC will apply to the federal government for an official FQHC designation.

However, the space at Julian Thomas is meant to be a temporary home for the RCHC. Planning is already underway to construct a new, much larger and more comprehensive health care facility in the currently empty City block just north of

Julian Thomas. This new building would include 30,000 square feet for a permanent home for the RCHC, as well as an additional 27,000 square feet for a revitalized community center to replace the current aging building. The City's 2021 budget included planning and construction funds for this new facility, with the goal of construction occurring in 2022.

The Governor's commitment to fully fund the project, should the legislation pass, would catalyze and expedite this project, and would represent an incredible step forward in providing high quality, affordable access to health care for thousands of Racine's residents.

"I want to thank the Governor prioritizing the health of Racine's residents. His commitment to the City of Racine could have a significant impact on addressing disparities and providing healthcare access to the City's most vulnerable populations. Because of the partnerships we have formed locally, and with the support of Governor Evers, should this legislation pass, this project could get underway this year," **said Mayor Cory Mason.**

Mason continued, "The space at Julian Thomas was always meant to be temporary home for the RCHC. But we always envisioned it being located in the Lincoln-King neighborhood, which is our most diverse, but also most economically challenged neighborhood. Funds to enable the swift planning and construction of this health center, along with a modern community center, all still connected to Julian Thomas Elementary School, would be a game changer for the Lincoln King neighborhood and for Racine's residents. I want to sincerely thank all our partners, including the Governor, as we continue the work to make this shared vision a reality."

"When families are healthy and well, students come to school ready to learn. We are thrilled to partner on this initiative as well as the community schools to support our Racine families and ensure students are successful," **said Dr. Eric Gallien, Superintendent of Racine Unified School District,** of the project.

"The Racine Community Health Center was born out of listening to our community concerns about access and affordable health services. Providing a clinic in the heart of the city will dramatically improve the health and wellness of city residents," **said Dr. Bryan Albrecht, Gateway Technical College President and CEO.** "Gateway is committed to expanding nurse training by opening a new training program on the Racine Campus. This includes a \$7 million investment that would

complement the Governor's proposed commitment to the Racine Community Health Center."

"This special session is a major opportunity to reduce health disparities, increase access to affordable care, and invest in our shared health and future as a community and as a state," **said State Representative Greta Neubauer**, who represents the Lincoln-King neighborhood. "If the Legislature moves forward and expands BadgerCare, our neighbors will not only have access to more affordable health insurance, but also easier access to high-quality care close to home. I'm grateful to the Governor for seeing the importance of investing in the Racine Community Health Center, and for the extensive work Mayor Mason and our local partners have done in moving this vision forward."

Governor Evers signed Executive Order #116 which calls a special session of the Wisconsin State Legislature to take up the proposed legislation next Tues., May 25, 2021, at 12:00 p.m. The legislation as a whole would expand BadgerCare and invest the \$1 billion in cost savings realized under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into Wisconsin's economic recovery and more than 50 projects and economic development initiatives across the state, including the Racine Community Health Center.