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Petition urges state leaders to seek more federal money for skilled nursing and rehabilitative care

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BY JAN JARVIS

jjarvis@star-telegram.com

Residents of a Fort Worth nursing and rehabilitative center, along with family members and workers, lined up Tuesday to sign a petition urging state leaders to seek more federal dollars for their care.

Organizers of the "Driving for Quality Care" petition tour are asking state leaders to use a portion of the just-passed \$858 million in emergency federal Medicaid relief to support skilled nursing and rehabilitative care.

"There's no question the funds are needed," said Tim Graves, president of the Texas Health Care Association in Austin. "We want to make sure Gov. Perry accepts those funds."

Earlier this month, President Barack Obama signed into law a bill that will provide \$16.1 billion in extra federal Medicaid funds to states as part of a bill that also provides billions for education. But the money is only available if state governors apply for the funding by Sept. 24.

Gov. Rick Perry has said stimulus money usurps the state's authority and opposes assistance that comes with strings attached. Texas was the only state singled out with mandates in the bill, added by Texas Democrats, which would commit the state to future education spending.

The Southwest Nursing and Rehabilitative Center in Fort Worth was the 38th stop on a 40-state petition tour organized by the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living to highlight the need to protect services to seniors and preserve caregiver jobs.

Mack Baldrige, administrator for Southwest, called on Perry to preserve long-term care services so that patients continue to receive the quality care they deserve.

"The funds will go to those who need it most -- the elderly and the disabled," he said.

With \$25.6 million in state Medicaid cuts going into effect Sept. 1, any supplementary funding from the federal relief measure would be timely and helpful, Graves said.

Doris Sharp, whose mother lives at the Fort Worth nursing facility, said she wasn't a public speaker, but the topic was too important for her to stay quiet.

"I strongly urge everyone to spread the word about this effort," Sharp said. "Together we can make a difference."

Jan Jarvis, 817-390-7664

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