

0499

Brackbill, Robert

From: Wyatt, David [David.Wyatt@aiu3.net]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 2:31 PM
To: Brackbill, Robert
Subject: FW: Scanned image from MX-4111N
Attachments: RESCENTRAL1_20120403_142950.pdf

Good afternoon. I have just registered to speak at the April 17 session at the Westin for the Highmark/WPAHS queries. Please find enclosed my comments. Thank you.

-----Original Message-----

From: aepscan@aiu3.net [mailto:aepscan@aiu3.net] On Behalf Of aepscan@
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 2:30 PM
To: Wyatt, David
Subject: Scanned image from MX-4111N

Reply to: aepscan@aiu3.net <aepscan@aiu3.net> Device Name: AUI Device Model: MX-4111N
Location: 59 Penn Circle West

File Format: PDF MMR(G4)
Resolution: 300dpi x 300dpi

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Good morning. My name is David Wyatt. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Highmark/West Penn Allegheny Health System Affiliation. I am a labor trustee on the Allegheny County Schools Health Insurance Consortium. I am the current chairperson. Our consortium is comprised of forty-nine entities in Allegheny County, all Allegheny County school districts but the city of Pittsburgh and North Allegheny School District. We also cover Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3, Mount Oliver Intermediate Unit 2, as well as Community College of Allegheny County. As such, we oversee 19,237 contracts which translate into 42,000 individuals.

As I said we cover districts located in Allegheny County but have members who live in contiguous counties as well as some who live farther away but still utilize facilities here. We are in the process of accepting the Community College of Beaver County as well as a district from Westmoreland County. These members would bring additional people to our group.

As a constituent of the consortium and a long-time educator who happens to live not only in Allegheny County but also the city of Pittsburgh, I feel very strongly that it is imperative that the West Penn Allegheny Health System be allowed to continue to exist. This is necessary for both the consumer, the region, and for the free flow of competition. Should WPAHS fade away physicians will have no choice of where or how they practice medicine. This could possibly result in an exodus of skilled people to other areas thus causing rising medical costs and overload for those remaining.

As we all are aware, health costs are rising everyday despite the efforts to contain them. Should WPAHS not be available, the entire community would suffer as employers struggle to continue to provide benefits. There is also the specter that patients could and would go without needed health care thereby causing a lower quality of life. This marriage of Highmark and WPAHS would not only preserve choices and help control costs, it would maintain employment. The livelihood of thousands of Western Pennsylvanians, those businesses that provide goods and services to the health system would continue to thrive as would the ancillary businesses in the neighborhoods such as the North Side, Bloomfield, Canonsburg, and others.

While not a business person, I am aware of the goals of competition. In the classroom, using teams to create interest and expand thinking is a tried and true method. Competition works. It keeps everybody in the game on their toes. Here, without WPAHS, there would be no competition. While most markets in the United States have at least two health care delivery systems, very few have one-dominant provider system as we do here in Western Pennsylvania.

Research shows that here in Pittsburgh, residents spend the highest percentage of income on insurance premiums compared to other cities. Pittsburgh also has a much higher utilization of many outpatient services compared with an average of other areas in the Mid-Atlantic region. Competition among viable health care systems is necessary. It is critical to improving quality, expanding access, and containing health costs. Employers now under the current economy are struggling to provide benefits. Without these, patients will forego care and suffer serious to dire consequences.

As a consortium trustee, I am aware of the concerns about Highmark becoming a provider as well as an insurer. However, there is now a national trend toward the development of integrated delivery systems

where there is an alignment of provider and insurer to contain costs and improve the quality of care available to the patient.

This system of WPAHS and Highmark would fulfill the vision of building a structure that transforms into an entity that would accomplish that: reduce cost, improve quality, and create a better experience for us, the patients. The physician-led approach of WPAHS would provide for innovative reimbursements models and better engage my members as well as all consumers through a greater transparency.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I would like to urge the state to act quickly to save these hospitals. WPAHS has been rated one of the top 57 health care centers by Reuters based on quality and patient satisfaction. Allegheny General, standing tall on the Northside, has been recognized for patient-care quality regarding liver and heart transplants. And for a second year, AGH's adult liver transplant program performance posted a one-year survival rate that was the Pennsylvania's best and among the top 25 adult transplant programs in the country out of 139 medical centers.

While all of the medical issues are of extreme importance, I cannot leave without pointing out the obvious. The WPAHS hospitals are community assets. The day it reopened, the emergency room at West Penn in Bloomfield handled more than three times the expected cases. This system employs nearly 11,000, not just in the city but the surrounding districts and areas within the western part of the state. Hundreds of thousands of patients are seen and treated every year. Should the affiliation of Highmark and WPAHS not take place, the system would have no other recourse than to downsize. That would possibly allow those 11,000 employees and the collateral thousands who contribute to this area's economy and tax base to experience further uncertainty about the future.

The time to debate should be short. The financial situation at WPAHS is serious. Prolonging decision-making jeopardizes not only the employees but the patients. By being expedient and moving as quickly as possible, Highmark would be able to institute a new model of health care. This region would benefit from improved operating efficiencies. The financial soundness of WPAHS would result in continued progress for WPAHS. WPAHS would not only be able to meet its financial obligations, it would continue to provide excellent patient care. While I realize that the hearing today is regarding the Highmark – West Penn-AGH affiliation, it is also just as imperative that Highmark and UPMC sign a contract that would continue to provide access to community assets at a fair and equitable price. This would benefit the customers, the employees, and the region. That includes all of us in here today. That is truly the bottom line.

Thank you.