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Testimony of Jean Robinson, Community Leader and Forbes Hospice Volunteer

Pennsylvania Insurance Department Informational Public Hearing April 17, 2012

As a long time Pittsburgh resident and community volunteer, I am proud to offer my support for the West Penn Allegheny Health System's affiliation with Highmark.

I would first like to thank the Pennsylvania Insurance Commission for holding this public hearing on the most important matter in Pittsburgh – the future of health care.

Like so many Pittsburghers, I feel a strong devotion to my community. As such, I work as a volunteer for organizations which are important to me and my family. I have the privilege of having served on many community and health care boards including serving as a former board member of The Caring Place, an honorary member of the Children's Hospital board, a board member of The Buhl Foundation and a member of the Forbes Hospice Founder's Society.

It is my commitment to Forbes Hospice which brings me here today.

Forbes Hospice was the first hospice program in Pittsburgh. When Forbes Hospice opened its doors in 1979, I learned about its mission to bring dignity to the last stage of life for terminally ill patients and their families. The mission immediately struck a chord in my heart and I began to volunteer with Forbes Hospice from the very beginning.

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Back then, hospice was a concept, a philosophy, a dream for our community. We cared for an average of 5 patients a day. Today, Forbes Hospice serves over 125 patients a day - 1,600 new patients each year.

I am lucky and proud to have been part of the Forbes Hospice team which has pioneered hospice programs and a hospice movement in the country, as well as our region. Now, Forbes Hospice is the oldest and most trusted non-profit hospice and palliative care program in the Pittsburgh region.

Despite the rising costs of health care, Forbes Hospice continues to reach out to meet the changing needs of our population. Our programs are evidence of this: our pediatric program, nursing home outreach, respite program, 11th hour volunteer program and 12-bed inpatient unit are just a few of the ways we have tried to meet the needs expressed to us by those we serve. Recently, we started a special program to serve our dying veterans. It's our turn to serve those who have served their country so well.

Forbes Hospice's team of caregivers offers a signature approach—a compassionate, loving approach to meet the needs of our patients and their families. At a time when families are faced with the burden of care giving and emotional stress, we are there to help them.

We couldn't see the future as bright without the generous spirit of those who believe in and support our mission. We are grateful every day to the organizations and individuals who support our efforts to give exceptional service to each person who seeks our care. While Forbes Hospice is a part of a larger health system, The West Penn Allegheny Health System, Forbes Hospice cannot be expected to survive on its own.

West Penn Allegheny believes in the mission of hospice and the special place Forbes Hospice now holds in the hearts of Pittsburghers. Even as West Penn Allegheny Health System has experienced troubling times, the system has supported Forbes Hospice. Forbes Hospice has a wealth of experience in delivering comprehensive hospice care to the

community and feature nationally-recognized leadership, including a full-time medical director, board certified in hospice and palliative medicine; who can make house calls at patient's homes or in facilities.

I fear that if West Penn Allegheny and Highmark do not receive your approval to affiliate, we are sure this treasured community asset will suffer, the hard work of decades of dedicated hospice workers will come to an end and the Forbes Hospice irreplaceable, inimitable and signature end of life care approach will be lost to the generation to come.

Aside from the preservation of Forbes Hospice and its workers, I believe the Highmark and WPAHS's proposed affiliation will result in strengthening WPAHS facilities as we have seen recently at West Penn Hospital. Revitalizing West Penn Hospital by reopening the Emergency Department is providing much needed services to the surrounding communities.

Through my experience over the years on health care boards, I understand that Highmark and WPAHS's proposed agreement is part of a bigger strategy to build an integrated health system and deliver value, choice and high-quality health care. An integrated health system will help to fix health-care delivery problems that lead to higher medical costs. I have experienced first-hand the inefficiencies which exist where there is a lack of coordinated care.

Finally, this affiliation will also ensure that patients have a choice for their care in western Pennsylvania. Western Pennsylvanians want and deserve various options for health care.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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