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3 COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

4 DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

5

Volume: I Pages: 1-86

6 PUBLIC HEARING VIA CONFERENCE CALL )

7 )

8 RE: BERKSHIRE HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS, INC. )

9 DETERMINATION OF NEED PUBLIC HEARING )

10

11

12 BEFORE: Dennis Renaud, Director of the Determination

13 of Need Program 14

15 Lucy Clark, Department of Public Health 16

17 (All participants appeared by conference call.) 18

19 6:00 p.m.

20 Wednesday, October 25, 2023

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1. **P R O C E E D I N G S**
2. **THE OPERATOR: I would now like to turn**
3. **the call over to Dennis Renaud. You may**
4. **begin.**
5. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Good evening.**
6. **My name is Dennis Renaud. I represent the**
7. **Massachusetts Department of Public Health,**
8. **and I am the Director of the Determination**
9. **of Need Program.**
10. **For clarification, you will hear me**
11. **refer to the Determination of Need Program**
12. **as the DoN program and the Department of**
13. **Public Health as the DPH.**
14. **Joining me today from the department is**
15. **my colleague Lucy Clarke. On behalf of the**
16. **department's commissioner, Dr. Robert**
17. **Goldstein, and our bureau director,**
18. **Elizabeth Kelley, I want to thank you for**
19. **taking the time this evening to participate**
20. **in this hearing.**
21. **The Department is holding this hearing**
22. **virtually by conference call in order to**
23. **promote public access. The hearing has been**
24. **called pursuant to an application submitted**
25. **by Berkshire Health Systems, Inc.**
26. **Upon receipt of the application, DoN**
27. **staff reviewed the application and after**
28. **finding it to be in compliance with the DoN**
29. **statute and regulations filing assigned it a**
30. **filing date of September 1, 2023. This DoN**
31. **application is for Berkshire Health Systems,**
32. **Inc.**
33. **The enabling statute for the DoN**
34. **program requires that any person or**
35. **government agency intending to obtain an**
36. **original license as defined in the DoN**
37. **regulations must apply for DoN approval**
38. **before engaging in such a project.**
39. **I will now provide an overview of the**
40. **project description. The proposed project**
41. **will return 18 inpatient beds to the North**
42. **Adams Community. In addition to returning**
43. **inpatient services to the Northern Berkshire**
44. **community, the applicant will convert**
45. **certain Berkshire Medical Center satellite**
46. **services including the BMC satellite**
47. **emergency facility to the North Adams**
48. **Regional Hospital license as part of the**
49. **proposed project.**
50. **The re-imagined North Adams Regional**
51. **Hospital will have 18 medical surgical beds**
52. **which will also be certified for use as**
53. **swing beds for subacute care, a four-room**
54. **mixed inpatient/outpatient surgical space**
55. **comprised of existing open and closed**
56. **operating and endoscopy rooms from the prior**
57. **hospital and current satellite facility as**
58. **well as imaging, emergency services and**
59. **other outpatient services. The total value**
60. **of the proposed project based on the**
61. **national capital expenditure is $2,850,000.**
62. **In accordance with the statute and**
63. **regulations governing the DoN process, the**
64. **DoN program is analyzing Berkshire Health**
65. **Systems' application for compliance with a**
66. **set of standards and criteria including, but**
67. **not limited to, a justification of the need**
68. **for the project, its planning process,**
69. **financial feasibility, environmental**
70. **impact, and the reasonableness of costs and**
71. **expenditures. These are the key criteria**
72. **which the DoN program will apply in its**
73. **analysis of the application.**
74. **This public hearing is an effort to**
75. **gather information and to hear the opinions**
76. **of interested parties about the proposed**
77. **project. It is not intended to be a**
78. **question and answer session. No questions**
79. **will be permitted.**
80. **The DoN program will take all relevant**
81. **information into account in preparing its**
82. **recommendation to the Massachusetts Public**
83. **Health Council, whose decision on whether to**
84. **improve the DoN for the proposed project**
85. **will be made at one of its upcoming monthly**
86. **meetings. We will accept written comments**
87. **on this application for 10 days following**
88. **this hearing.**
89. **As this is a virtual hearing, the**
90. **logistics are different from in-person**
91. **hearings. I will review our process for**
92. **today. We are learning the logistics of the**
93. **system as we go. We ask for your patience**
94. **if and when we encounter difficulties. We**
95. **will work to resolve any problems we**
96. **experience.**
    1. **Our plan for tonight is as follows: We**
    2. **are using a moderated conference call line,**
    3. **so a moderator will manage the queue for**
    4. **speaking. This meeting is being recorded**
    5. **and transcribed. Press Star 1 if you would**
    6. **like to testify. This will put you in the**
    7. **queue. You will not be told where you are**
    8. **in the queue nor will you get much notice**
    9. **that you are about to testify.**
    10. **When it is your turn to testify, you**
    11. **will be told you are now the speaker and**
    12. **will experience a short silence and then**
    13. **will be the speaker. If you have muted your**
    14. **phone, you may need to unmute.**
    15. **Please begin by stating your name,**
    16. **affiliation or town of residence. Please**
    17. **speak clearly so that our transcriber can**
    18. **record everything accurately.**
    19. **Because we expect many speakers, we**
    20. **will limit everyone to three minutes. I**
    21. **will be timing people, and when you have 30**
    22. **seconds left, you will hear this sound**
    23. **(timer played). When your three minutes are**
    24. **through, I will say "Time's up," and the**
97. **moderator will mute you and give the floor**
98. **to the next speaker. We may experience a**
99. **slight pause between speakers.**
100. **If testimony is lengthy, we suggest you**
101. **present a three-minute summary of those**
102. **remarks and submit a full text of your**
103. **comments in writing. If you have a written**
104. **copy of your comments, regardless of length,**
105. **please feel free to submit it to the**
106. **department by November 6 by email or via**
107. **postal service. Email us at**
108. [**dph.don@state.ma.us.**](mailto:dph.don@state.ma.us)
109. **Mail will get to us quickly if it is**
110. **sent to Determination of Need, Massachusetts**
111. **Department of Public Health, 67 Forest**
112. **Street, Marlborough, Massachusetts 01752.**
113. **Be assured that the department will consider**
114. **all comments whether presented orally or in**
115. **writing. Whether you comment or not, please**
116. **know the Department greatly values and**
117. **appreciates your participation in the DoN**
118. **process.**
119. **Before we open the line to the general**
120. **public, the applicant will go first and will**
121. **be allotted four minutes to present**
122. **information about the proposed project.**
123. **Following the presentation, we will provide**
124. **an opportunity for elected officials from**
125. **the community to comment and then begin**
126. **calling on those individuals who request to**
127. **speak this evening.**
128. **I would now like to invite Darlene**
129. **Rodowicz, President and CEO of Berkshire**
130. **Health Systems, to make a brief statement on**
131. **the proposed project. Welcome Darlene.**
132. **MS. RODOWICZ: Thank you, Dennis. Good**
133. **evening, I'm Darlene Rodowicz, President and**
134. **CEO of Berkshire Health Systems.**
135. **On behalf of all of us at BHS, I would**
136. **like to thank Commissioner Goldstein and the**
137. **Massachusetts Department of Public Health**
138. **for giving us this opportunity to discuss**
139. **our vision to bring inpatient care back to**
140. **North Adams and the Northern Berkshire**
141. **community counties.**
142. **Our goal is to expand access to health**
143. **care in the underserved region of Northern**
144. **Berkshire. However, to understand the full**
145. **implications of what this project really**
146. **means for the community, I'd like to share a**
147. **bit about North Adams and the overall health**
148. **care landscape in the area.**
149. **North Adams is a city that has worked**
150. **hard to transcend its identity as an aging**
151. **mill town. Despite advances in economic and**
152. **cultural redevelopment, North Adams remains**
153. **a community with significant health care**
154. **needs.**
155. **Many residents are seniors with**
156. **increasing health concerns and a large**
157. **portion of the community faces both**
158. **socioeconomic and health challenges relating**
159. **to substance use and limited opportunities**
160. **for economic advancement.**
161. **The abrupt closure of North Adams**
162. **Regional Hospital in 2014 didn't just result**
163. **in a loss of a hospital facility, it created**
164. **a region wide emergency that disrupted**
165. **access to fundamental health care and caused**
166. **a broader disruption in the community's**
167. **well-being and economic stability.**
168. **The story of hospital closures**
     1. **impacting rural communities is not unique to**
     2. **Berkshire County or even to Massachusetts.**
     3. **Many national conversations around health**
     4. **care link challenges in access with**
     5. **increasing rates of health disparities**
     6. **particularly in rural regions where**
     7. **inequities are perpetuated by deeply rooted**
     8. **and profoundly flawed historical systems and**
     9. **processes.**
     10. **In 2020, a federal report underscored**
     11. **the need for policy driven solutions to**
     12. **achieve health equity, and it was against**
     13. **this backdrop that changes to the CMS**
     14. **criteria for critical access hospitals or**
     15. **CAH designation emerged. The CAH**
     16. **designation with its cost-based**
     17. **reimbursement helps to ensure the**
     18. **continuation of essential health services in**
     19. **rural and underserved areas across the**
     20. **country. It is a lifeline for rural**
     21. **communities like ours and the reason why we**
     22. **have brought this project forward.**
     23. **I'd like to direct your attention to**
     24. **the three core elements of our proposal to**
169. **help explain why the re-emergence of North**
170. **Adams Regional Hospital Corporation under**
171. **BHS leadership is so critical to our region.**
172. **First, Clinical Care: Returning inpatient**
173. **beds to North Adams under a CAH designation**
174. **will have clear impact on the accessibility**
175. **of care for patients, which in turn can**
176. **directly lead to improved health outcomes.**
177. **Our BHS physicians are excited about**
178. **the ways that a critical access hospital can**
179. **offer unique and flexible options for rural**
180. **patient care and focus much needed resources**
181. **on addressing the health challenges in our**
182. **community's most vulnerable residents.**
183. **Second, Social and Economic**
184. **Opportunities: For North Adams the**
185. **possibility of opening a critical access**
186. **hospital is a chance to help revitalize a**
187. **community. Our health system administrators**
188. **and community partners are eager to continue**
189. **enhancing our programs for education,**
190. **employment and health equity in ways that**
191. **will support growth and opportunities for**
192. **residents of North Adams and the surrounding**
193. **area.**
194. **And the overwhelming community support**
195. **we've received including numerous letters**
196. **following our public meeting this past**
197. **summer underscores the shared community**
198. **understanding of the profound potential of**
199. **this project.**
200. **Third, Stewardship and Sustainability:**
201. **As you'll see from the data submitted with**
202. **our proposal, our Northern Berkshire**
203. **community needs an inpatient hospital. This**
204. **need was made clear at the time of the**
205. **hospital closure 10 years ago in the**
206. **Stroudwater report commissioned by the state**
207. **and remains true today.**
208. **Each facet of our proposal underscores**
209. **our commitment to addressing the public**
210. **health priorities of the Commonwealth of**
211. **Massachusetts, including ensuring that the**
212. **health care we provide is accessible,**
213. **sustainable, and of high value to the**
214. **public. BHS is committed to collaborating**
215. **with local, state and federal entities to**
216. **ensure the sustainability of health care in**
217. **the region.**
218. **I hope you will agree that this project**
219. **offers us an exceptional opportunity to**
220. **address barriers to patient care, promote**
221. **social and economic improvement, and advance**
222. **the health and wellness of the Northern**
223. **Berkshire region and our entire community.**
224. **Thank you for your time and consideration.**
225. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. We will begin**
226. **now by taking comments from invited elected**
227. **officials. Our first speaker will be Mayor**
228. **Jennifer Macksey, Mayor of North Adams.**
229. **MS. MACKSEY: Thank you, Dennis. Can**
230. **everyone hear me okay?**
231. **MR. RENAUD: Yes.**
232. **MS. MACKSEY: Okay. Good evening. My**
233. **name is Jennifer Macksey. I am a lifelong**
234. **resident of North Adams and the city's**
235. **mayor.**
236. **As mayor, I'm deeply committed to the**
237. **growth and well-being of North Adams, and I**
238. **strongly believe that the reopening of**
239. **inpatient care by BHS will have a positive**
240. **overall impact on the future of our region.**
     1. **Healthcare is a cornerstone of any**
     2. **thriving community. Beyond treatment, it's**
     3. **about understanding accessibility and the**
     4. **assurance that every resident's well-being**
     5. **is prioritized. The revival of North Adams**
     6. **Regional Hospital exemplifies this vision**
     7. **and will help to make widespread access to**
     8. **essential health care services a reality,**
     9. **especially for many aging residents who face**
     10. **challenges accessing timely medical care due**
     11. **to distance and transportation. Reopening**
     12. **our local hospital is a practical solution**
     13. **to ensure that medical care is within reach**
     14. **for everyone.**
     15. **I'm very optimistic about the economic**
     16. **opportunities for employment and education**
     17. **that the hospital will provide to our**
     18. **residents. Our hospital return represents**
     19. **more than a medical facility. It symbolizes**
     20. **our collective commitment to health,**
     21. **progress, and community resilience.**
     22. **I fully support this initiative as a**
     23. **key step towards a brighter and healthier**
     24. **future for the city of North Adams. Thank**
241. **you very much.**
242. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Our next**
243. **speaker will be Massachusetts Senator Paul**
244. **Mark.**
245. **MR. MARK: (Inaudible) state senator**
246. **for North Adams and Northern Berkshire**
247. **County and a total of 57 cities and towns**
248. **that make up the Berkshire, Hampden,**
249. **Franklin and Hampshire senate district. I'm**
250. **pleased to be here tonight to support the**
251. **proposed project and to reintroduce**
252. **inpatient care in North Adams.**
253. **I want to acknowledge Mayor Macksey, my**
254. **colleague Representative John Barrett, who's**
255. **also here tonight and shares representation**
256. **of North Adams and the surrounding**
257. **communities with me at the statehouse and**
258. **recognize his support along with that of**
259. **Massachusetts 1st District Congressman**
260. **Richard Neal. I'm honored to be working**
261. **with them every day to advocate for our**
262. **constituents and highlight the issues that**
263. **uniquely impact the rural communities of the**
264. **Berkshires and Western Massachusetts.**
     1. **We all know that the revitalization of**
     2. **a hospital in Northern Berkshire County will**
     3. **have many benefits for patients, but I want**
     4. **to emphasize the significant economic**
     5. **opportunities it will offer for our**
     6. **residents, new jobs as doctors, nurses,**
     7. **clinicians, support service professionals**
     8. **and technicians, not to mention the**
     9. **multiplier effect that having a vibrant**
     10. **professional organization in the heart of**
     11. **North Adams will have on other businesses in**
     12. **the city and the surrounding region.**
     13. **I'm also particularly grateful that**
     14. **Berkshire Health Systems has committed to**
     15. **upholding the union agreements for**
     16. **bargaining unit positions at the new North**
     17. **Adams Regional Hospital campus, which is an**
     18. **important recognition of the rights of our**
     19. **dedicated healthcare workers.**
     20. **I'm optimistic about the profound**
     21. **impact this project will have both on our**
     22. **community's health and its economic**
     23. **landscape, and I'm glad to be able to**
     24. **endorse the project here tonight.**
         1. **I will also be sending along my written**
         2. **comments, and I want the Commission to feel**
         3. **free to follow up with me directly if there**
         4. **are any questions or if I can offer any**
         5. **further guidance. Thank you very much.**
         6. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Our next**
         7. **speaker will be Massachusetts Representative**
         8. **John Barrett, III.**
         9. **MR. BARRETT: Good evening. This is**
         10. **John Barrett, and I reside in the city of**
         11. **North Adams, a community which I served 13**
         12. **terms as mayor. I now serve as state**
         13. **representative from the 1st Berkshire**
         14. **District, which comprises of 13 communities**
         15. **in the Northern Berkshire area.**
         16. **My tenure in public service is**
         17. **prolonged, and it has provided me with a**
         18. **unique opportunity to offer a perspective on**
         19. **the importance of the North Adams campus and**
         20. **its reopening in being designated a critical**
         21. **access hospital. The impact of the North**
         22. **Adams Regional Hospital since closing its**
         23. **doors 10 years ago can best be illustrated**
         24. **by these following facts: The population**
265. **has dropped by double digits in the 10 year**
266. **period. MCLA, Massachusetts College of**
267. **Liberal Arts, has half the students today**
268. **than it did 10 years ago, and our local**
269. **newspaper closed after 150 years.**
270. **Even after Berkshire Health Systems**
271. **reopened a satellite operation, we have**
272. **struggled, and we've not yet recovered. A**
273. **large detriment to those looking to relocate**
274. **to Northern Berkshire County is not having a**
275. **critical access hospital. We have two**
276. **colleges, 3300 students less than eight**
277. **minutes away from this campus site. There**
278. **are several hundred athletes competing in**
279. **events over the course of the school year,**
280. **which raises concerns to those parents in**
281. **choosing the college for their children.**
282. **I was mayor when the administration of**
283. **the former North Adams Regional Hospital**
284. **decided not to move forward in seeking a**
285. **permanent designation as a critical access**
286. **hospital in 1988. If they hadn't made that**
287. **terrible decision, how much different would**
288. **the face of Northern Berkshire be today,**
289. **especially in regards to our economy.**
290. **Through the hard work of so many,**
291. **especially Congressman Richard Neal,**
292. **Berkshire Health Systems has invested over**
293. **-- along with Berkshire Health Systems has**
294. **invested over millions of dollars in the**
295. **North Adams campus. Northern Berkshire is**
296. **now on the cusp of having stable health care**
297. **in the region and being a catalyst in**
298. **reinvigorating the area economy.**
299. **I've made it a priority to champion the**
300. **needs of our community over the years**
301. **especially when it comes to health care. It**
302. **was one of the primary reasons that I**
303. **returned to elective office. I've worked**
304. **alongside the Berkshire delegation with**
305. **great success. We made our voices heard on**
306. **the state level as we fought to save**
307. **community hospitals throughout this area.**
308. **I want to acknowledge again U.S. Rep.**
309. **Richard Neal for his significant role in**
310. **bringing about federal changes to the**
311. **critical access hospital program that has**
312. **paved the way for this project to move**
313. **forward.**
314. **I've been passionately fighting for the**
315. **return of this hospital for many years, and**
316. **I can assure you that this project isn't**
317. **just about health care. It's about**
318. **employment, economic growth, restoring the**
319. **heart of our community. I urge everyone to**
320. **support this project for a brighter future**
321. **for North Adams and the Northern Berkshire**
322. **area. Thank you.**
323. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Congressman**
324. **Richard Neal has submitted written testimony**
325. **and that will be made available.**
326. **Massachusetts Representatives Committee,**
327. **Karen Kelly, intends to submit written**
328. **testimony as well.**
329. **We will now be taking comments from the**
330. **public. If you wish to speak at this time,**
331. **please hit Star 1 and follow the**
332. **instructions of the operator. Operator, may**
333. **we have our first speaker now please.**
334. **THE OPERATOR: The first speaker is**
335. **Alec Belman. Your line is open.**
336. **MR. BELMAN: Good evening, members of**
     1. **the Department of Public Health and fellow**
     2. **attendees. I'm Dr. Alec Belman, resident**
     3. **and chief of staff at Fairview Hospital,**
     4. **Berkshire Health Systems critical access**
     5. **hospital in Great Barrington. I'm also an**
     6. **ex officio member of the BHS Board of**
     7. **Trustees.**
     8. **The rural communities across Berkshire**
     9. **County from north to south face distinct**
     10. **challenges in ensuring access to health**
     11. **care. However, these challenges have always**
     12. **presented us with opportunities to innovate.**
     13. **This type of flexibility is at the core of**
     14. **the critical access hospital program, which**
     15. **was designed to provide various types of**
     16. **short-term care for rural patients close to**
     17. **home.**
     18. **One of the flexible program elements**
     19. **provided for by the federal government is a**
     20. **swing bed program, which allows critical**
     21. **access hospitals to provide skilled nursing**
     22. **level care to patients who do not need**
     23. **hospital level of care but still have high**
     24. **acuity conditions. Patients benefit from**
337. **staying in a familiar environment surrounded**
338. **by a consistent care team. This not only**
339. **enhances their care experience, but does so**
340. **without imposing additional costs on the**
341. **system.**
342. **In my experience at Fairview, swing**
343. **beds have been an invaluable resource for**
344. **patients to have a convenient transitional**
345. **care option that is close to home. This**
346. **project will be able to offer similar value**
347. **to North County patients and will be**
348. **especially helpful to those with a high**
349. **level of health and social need who can**
350. **receive continuous care in one location that**
351. **spans both their acute and post-acute care**
352. **needs.**
353. **Additionally, at Berkshire Medical**
354. **Center, we routinely have patients with**
355. **delayed discharge due to the various**
356. **barriers to placement at a local post-acute**
357. **facility. Having the flexibility of swing**
358. **beds will enable us to continue providing**
359. **short-term care for those patients who are**
360. **eligible, getting them the right level of**
361. **care at the right time.**
362. **Being able to shift appropriate**
363. **patients to swing-bed status at a critical**
364. **access hospital also helps preserve the**
365. **availability of acute inpatient resources at**
366. **Berkshire Medical Center for those with**
367. **higher level needs, an approach that CMS and**
368. **DPH supported during the height of the COVID**
369. **crisis.**
370. **I wholeheartedly support this project**
371. **for creating a critical access hospital in**
372. **North Adams and appreciate your**
373. **consideration. Thank you for your time.**
374. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
375. **we have the next speaker, please.**
376. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Tara**
377. **Gregorio. Your line is open.**
378. **MS. GREGORIO: Thank you. Good**
379. **evening. My name is Tara Gregorio, and on**
380. **behalf of the Mass. Senior Care Association,**
381. **we want to thank you for the opportunity to**
382. **testify.**
383. **Firstly, we support the intent of the**
384. **application as has been described by you,**
385. **the director, and later by Darlene to**
386. **increase the availability of acute-care**
387. **services for residents of Northern Berkshire**
388. **County. However, we are concerned that this**
389. **project will have unintended negative**
390. **consequences that will threaten both choice**
391. **and access to long-term care services in**
392. **Berkshire County just as demand for these**
393. **vital services is growing.**
394. **Specifically, we are concerned that**
395. **permitting the applicants to use all of its**
396. **18 acute-care beds as so-called swing beds**
397. **will put the 13 Berkshire County nursing**
398. **facilities at a disadvantage and may result**
399. **in nursing facility closures. Swing beds is**
400. **the term used to describe a hospital room**
401. **that can switch from inpatient acute-care**
402. **status to skilled nursing care status.**
403. **The use of swing beds has the practical**
404. **result of keeping patients who need skilled**
405. **nursing facility level of care in the**
406. **hospital instead of discharging to a local**
407. **nursing facility. This is sometimes**
408. **necessary when there are no nearby skilled**
409. **nursing facilities, but that is simply not**
410. **the case in Berkshire County.**
411. **Typically, this nursing facility level**
412. **of care is funded by Medicare, which is**
413. **exactly the resident that nursing facilities**
414. **rely on to offset severely low Medicaid**
415. **underfunding. The irrefutable data and**
416. **facts are that nursing facilities with less**
417. **Medicare revenue are more likely to close,**
418. **experience lower staffing levels, and poorer**
419. **outcomes.**
420. **To add to this, we are concerned that**
421. **our already scarce and invaluable clinical**
422. **ancillary staff will be recruited away from**
423. **Berkshire County long-term care facilities**
424. **to work at this newly established acute-care**
425. **center. We learned together with the**
426. **Department as well as Health and Human**
427. **Services during the COVID-19 pandemic that**
428. **the single biggest barrier to building**
429. **additional acute and post-acute capacity is**
430. **hiring the workforce necessary to staff**
431. **these facilities.**
432. **Since North Adams Regional Hospital**
     1. **through its critical access designation will**
     2. **have unlimited access to government funding**
     3. **to offer competitive wages that are well**
     4. **above the pay rates at nursing facilities**
     5. **and potentially all other employers in the**
     6. **region, we believe that Berkshire County**
     7. **nursing facilities are acutely disadvantaged**
     8. **and at severe risk for being unable to**
     9. **retain the staff necessary to maintain**
     10. **operations.**
     11. **This alarming inequity is due to two**
     12. **key reasons. One, both Medicare and**
     13. **Medicaid reimburse critical access hospitals**
     14. **at their full cost plus a profit. And**
     15. **secondly, and by stark contrast, the state's**
     16. **Medicaid program, according to the federal**
     17. **agency MACCAP, vastly underfunds by $47 per**
     18. **resident per day the cost of quality nursing**
     19. **facility care, which means that Berkshire**
     20. **Health Systems will have an advantage over**
     21. **all other (timer played) -- I understand**
     22. **that my time is at the end.**
     23. **I have many, many more comments that**
     24. **will be submitted in writing, but we do ask**
433. **that DPH use its authority to appropriately**
434. **impose conditions to the approval of the DoN**
435. **that seeks to preserve vital long-term care**
436. **services in Berkshire County while also**
437. **supporting this new project. Thank you.**
438. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,**
439. **could we please have the next speaker.**
440. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
441. **James Birge. Your line is open.**
442. **MR. BIRGE: Good evening, and thank**
443. **you. My name is James Birge, and I'm a**
444. **resident of North Adams. I also serve as**
445. **president of Massachusetts College of**
446. **Liberal Arts, a nationally recognized public**
447. **four-year college located in North Adams.**
448. **I'm here to share more about our**
449. **transformative partnership with Berkshire**
450. **Health Systems and express our full approval**
451. **for the proposed return of inpatient care**
452. **and the opening of a new North Adams**
453. **Regional Hospital.**
454. **As the nation experiences a healthcare**
455. **staffing shortage on a wide scale, MCLA has**
456. **intentionally worked to implement a**
457. **comprehensive health sciences program with**
458. **the capacity and the advanced technology**
459. **necessary to train the next generation of**
460. **health care workers in Berkshire County.**
461. **We have been fortunate to be able to**
462. **partner with Berkshire Health Systems in**
463. **this endeavor to help strengthen the college**
464. **career pipeline for healthcare professionals**
465. **in Berkshire County. We are grateful for**
466. **the health system support in everything from**
467. **providing financial support, teaching space,**
468. **clinical instructors, staff, student lab**
469. **space, clinical equipment, and even PPE.**
470. **We are incredibly proud of our new**
471. **Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program, the**
472. **first of its kind in the region which**
473. **launched earlier this fall with support from**
474. **Berkshire Health Systems. Rooted in the**
475. **liberal arts tradition, we are training**
476. **students to be not only adept clinicians,**
477. **but compassionate caregivers and informed**
478. **community members.**
479. **This integrated approach is made**
480. **possible by the real-world training**
481. **opportunities provided by a Berkshire Health**
482. **Systems facility offering our students a**
483. **direct bridge from classroom learning to**
484. **practical application.**
485. **The reopening of North Adams Regional**
486. **Hospital aligns perfectly with our mission.**
487. **The facility would not only serve as an**
488. **essential health care hub for the community**
489. **but also as a learning ground for our**
490. **students. This hospital offers them real-**
491. **life experiences, natural pathways for**
492. **clinical training, and a promising avenue**
493. **for future employment right in their**
494. **backyard.**
495. **Furthermore, the presence of a top-**
496. **tier hospital in our community is a**
497. **significant draw for prospective college**
498. **students. For families considering MCLA,**
499. **knowing that quality care is readily**
500. **accessible brings invaluable peace of mind.**
501. **The hospital's reopening will bolster our**
502. **recruitment efforts, assuring families that**
503. **their loved ones have immediate access to**
504. **comprehensive health care during their**
505. **college journey.**
506. **In summary, MCLA wholeheartedly**
507. **supports the project to reopen North Adams**
508. **Regional Hospital. In a partnership with**
509. **Berkshire Health Systems, we are not just**
510. **reshaping the healthcare leaders of**
511. **tomorrow, we're ensuring the well-being of**
512. **our students in the larger Northern**
513. **Berkshires community for years to come.**
514. **Thank you for your time this evening.**
515. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Just as a**
516. **reminder, the comments are allotted for**
517. **three minutes. And when you hear the chime,**
518. **it means that you do have 30 seconds left**
519. **for your comments. Operator, could we**
520. **please have the next speaker.**
521. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is John**
522. **Lipa. Your line is open.**
523. **MR. LIPA: Hi, my name is John Lipa.**
524. **One month from today 78 years ago, I was**
525. **born at the North Adams Regional Hospital,**
526. **"the Reg." I was raised, grew up and have**
527. **been active in North Adams. I was chair of**
528. **the following organizations: The North**
529. **Adams Redevelopment Authority, Northern**
530. **Berkshire Industrial Park Commission,**
531. **Northern Berkshire United Way, Berkshire**
532. **Regional Employment Board and the**
533. **Massachusetts Workforce Board. I worked for**
534. **31 years for General Dynamics in Pittsfield**
535. **and retired as the head person of human**
536. **resources.**
537. **Thank you for this opportunity to share**
538. **my thoughts and supportive of Berkshire**
539. **Health Systems Determination in Need and**
540. **intent to reopen the North Adams Regional**
541. **Hospital known to locals as "The Reg" to a**
542. **critical access hospital designation.**
543. **It would be wonderful knowing that**
544. **there is hospital not only in my community,**
545. **North Adams, but also in my neighborhood.**
546. **It would mean I would not have to take a**
547. **long bumpy ride on a two-lane road to a**
548. **hospital in either Bennington, Vermont, or**
549. **Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in an ambulance.**
550. **It would only be a two-minute ride from my**
551. **house in North Adams.**
552. **The reopening would be a huge**
     1. **psychological boost to the community knowing**
     2. **a semblance of The Reg is back in operation**
     3. **providing quality health care locally. It**
     4. **would mean the younger generations would be**
     5. **able to say as I do, my wife, three sisters-**
     6. **in-law, a mother-in-law, many cousins and**
     7. **friends worked there and had rewarding**
     8. **careers.**
     9. **It would mean that employers, including**
     10. **two local colleges, would have an easier**
     11. **time recruiting faculty, staff, and**
     12. **students. It would be an additional vital**
     13. **and robust asset to help those in need of**
     14. **medical and behavioral health treatment. It**
     15. **would mean northern Berkshire County would**
     16. **join central Berkshire County and southern**
     17. **Berkshire County with their own local**
     18. **hospital. It would mean Berkshire County**
     19. **would have a seamless integrated hospital**
     20. **system.**
     21. **It would mean more opportunities for**
     22. **doctors, nurses, aides and other healthcare**
     23. **specialties. It would mean Berkshire**
     24. **Community College, Massachusetts College of**
553. **Liberal Arts, and our outstanding vocational**
554. **technical school, McCann's, would be able to**
555. **train students for real jobs in the**
556. **healthcare field locally. It would mean**
557. **more disposable income for residents to**
558. **support local businesses, buy homes and**
559. **renovate.**
560. **It would mean more young people would**
561. **have not have to relocate to find a good**
562. **job. It would mean more young families**
563. **wanting to have children here and raise them**
564. **in our community. In short, only good**
565. **things will happen when the North Adams**
566. **Regional Hospital, The Reg, is reopened as a**
567. **critical access hospital under the guidance**
568. **of Berkshire Health Systems.**
569. **Thank you for listening, and please**
570. **make a decision to make the rebirth of the**
571. **North Adams Regional Hospital a reality.**
572. **Thank you.**
573. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,**
574. **could we please have the next speaker.**
575. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
576. **Richard Alcombright. Your line is open.**
     1. **MR. ALCOMBRIGHT: Thank you, and good**
     2. **evening, everyone. My name is Richard**
     3. **Alcombright, and I'm a resident of North**
     4. **Adams. I'm currently a volunteer member of**
     5. **the BHS Board of Trustees, and I served as**
     6. **the mayor of North Adams for eight years,**
     7. **including during the unexpected closure of**
     8. **North Adams Regional Hospital in 2014.**
     9. **I'm pleased beyond words to see our**
     10. **hospital, North Adams Regional, bringing**
     11. **back inpatient care. The abruptness of the**
     12. **hospital's closure took us all by surprise.**
     13. **In leadership you often have procedures and**
     14. **guidelines for various challenges, but**
     15. **nothing prepared me for the sudden loss of**
     16. **the community's medical lifeline. Our**
     17. **hospital provided both health care and**
     18. **economic stability, and its sudden closure**
     19. **was a major blow to our identity in so many**
     20. **ways.**
     21. **I maintain that we are incredibly**
     22. **blessed to have Berkshire Health Systems**
     23. **there to sustain and rebuild our services.**
     24. **I'm incredibly proud to serve on the board**
         1. **of the Berkshire Health Systems and can**
         2. **wholeheartedly say that this project is a**
         3. **tremendous step in advancing the**
         4. **organization's strategic efforts to improve**
         5. **health care access as part of our mission to**
         6. **advance and expand health and wellness for**
         7. **everyone in the community.**
         8. **Bringing inpatient care to North Adams**
         9. **will help to address major barriers for care**
         10. **for our residents and will help create**
         11. **connections to the many individuals -- the**
         12. **many individuals and families in this region**
         13. **struggling with poverty and poor health**
         14. **outcomes.**
         15. **I was particularly pleased to learn**
         16. **about BHS's proposed focus on supporting**
         17. **local efforts to address opioid addiction**
         18. **through the Community Health Initiative.**
         19. **There's hardly a family in the region that**
         20. **hasn't been touched in some way by the**
         21. **addiction of a friend or a loved one.**
         22. **On a deeply personal note, my family's**
         23. **own journey with substance use has cemented**
         24. **my belief in the necessity of local support**
577. **and resources. And I'm optimistic that the**
578. **revival of our hospital with a focus on**
579. **reducing health disparities and supporting**
580. **the most vulnerable in our community will be**
581. **instrumental in bolstering our fight against**
582. **substance use disorders.**
583. **Thank you all so much for your time and**
584. **your consideration.**
585. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
586. **we have the next speaker, please.**
587. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Lou**
588. **Ann Quinn. Your line is open.**
589. **MS. QUINN: Good evening. My name is**
590. **Lou Ann Quinn, and my town of residence is**
591. **North Adams, Massachusetts. I was the**
592. **former site director of the North Campus as**
593. **well as the clinical manager of the**
594. **satellite emergency facility since 2014**
595. **after the closure of North Adams Regional**
596. **Hospital. Prior to this, I was a nursing**
597. **director for NARH from 1976 to 2014.**
598. **The 2014 closure of NARH was**
599. **heartbreaking for me, and the recent**
600. **opportunity to apply for a CAH designation**
601. **and reopen inpatient services provides an**
602. **amazing opportunity for us to promote better**
603. **health outcomes for patients in our**
604. **community. Though I just recently retired**
605. **on September 30, I will do everything in my**
606. **power to support and promote the center.**
607. **Inpatient care in our community means**
608. **that patients can get essential care close**
609. **to home. Patients with pneumonia, heart**
610. **failure, COPD and chest pain, among other**
611. **diagnoses could receive care right here in**
612. **North Adams rather than being stabilized in**
613. **our satellite emergency department and then**
614. **transported for inpatient care to another**
615. **facility.**
616. **With family, friends and community**
617. **resources close by, patients are more likely**
618. **to experience positive outcomes. Providing**
619. **care close to home helps reduce the impacts**
620. **of social challenges, like lack of available**
621. **transportation to go home after discharge.**
622. **Further, limited ambulance transport**
623. **resources will now be reserved for patients**
624. **who need to go to our main campus or a**
625. **tertiary facility for a higher level of care**
626. **that can be provided at our CAH. This will**
627. **decrease delays in transfer and promote**
628. **better access to critical care.**
629. **Additionally, the comfort and**
630. **convenience of a local inpatient facility**
631. **makes it easier for patients to seek care**
632. **when they need it instead of waiting until**
633. **their symptoms are worse. I've personally**
634. **observed that patients in North County tend**
635. **to avoid or defer care due to lack of**
636. **transportation and financial resources or**
637. **available social support.**
638. **By offering hospital-level care close**
639. **to home, BHS will be able to deepen its**
640. **relationship with patients so that the North**
641. **County patient population will be less**
642. **likely to defer timely important care and**
643. **therefore will be more likely to experience**
644. **positive health outcomes.**
645. **I'd like to share a quick story about a**
646. **patient who delayed care and presented to**
647. **the staff after days of increasing chest**
648. **pain. The patient was markedly hypertensive**
649. **and short of breath on arrival.**
650. **Fortunately, the patient anginal symptoms**
651. **were rapidly managed and an impending**
652. **myocardial infarction or MI warded off, but**
653. **they needed further observation and**
654. **explained that the major reason for not**
655. **coming to the hospital was that a family**
656. **member needed care at home, and the patient**
657. **would be unable to do this from Pittsfield.**
658. **By having beds here at North Adams, the**
659. **patient acknowledged they would have been**
660. **more willing to come at the onset of their**
661. **pain and would have found it easier to**
662. **navigate the additional required days of**
663. **observation.**
664. **By improving access to care this**
665. **project can support our most vulnerable**
666. **residents. It helps create a -- (timer**
667. **played) culture for North Adams and the**
668. **whole northern Berkshire region. I strongly**
669. **support this project, and thank you for your**
670. **consideration.**
671. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. As a reminder,**
672. **if you would like to testify, please press**
673. **Star 1. Operator, may we have the next**
674. **speaker, please?**
675. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
676. **Jackie Felix. Your line is open.**
677. **MS. FELIX: Good evening. My name is**
678. **Jackie Felix. Thank you for allowing me the**
679. **opportunity to share with you my testimony**
680. **at this public hearing. I reside in North**
681. **Adams, and my husband, Bob, is a resident of**
682. **Williamstown Common Nursing and**
683. **Rehabilitation Center.**
684. **Bob and I have been married for 25**
685. **years. We're both in our 70s and have lived**
686. **in the Williamstown, North Adams, area for**
687. **most of our lives. As we aged, it became**
688. **clear that Bob was struggling with a number**
689. **of health-related issues. He was a vibrant**
690. **and engaged man who enjoyed outdoor**
691. **activities as well as time with friends and**
692. **family.**
693. **When his Alzheimer's disease**
694. **progressed, I became increasingly concerned**
695. **about his safety and how I would be able to**
696. **care for him. He would run away or elope**
697. **from our home, and keeping him safe began to**
698. **be my biggest priority. I tried for a long**
699. **time to keep him at home with me, but**
700. **eventually it became more than I could**
701. **handle.**
702. **I also told myself I would never put**
703. **Bob in the nursing home. I think many**
704. **people tell themselves that. In fairness,**
705. **it isn't where people aspire to be. As**
706. **humans, we convince ourselves that we're**
707. **invincible. We don't want to accept our**
708. **aging or infirmity or reliance on others.**
709. **We convince ourselves that we can take care**
710. **of it all and make it all work. I'm here to**
711. **say that this way of thinking can be flawed.**
712. **We don't do ourselves any favors when we**
713. **deny that we may need help along the way,**
714. **and we may need help for an extended period**
715. **of time like months, years, instead of a few**
716. **days.**
717. **Much as I would love to care for my**
718. **husband in our own home, it was not**
719. **possible. His care needs were too great,**
720. **and his safety was a constant risk. When he**
721. **suffered in late 2021 on top of Parkinson's**
722. **and Alzheimer's, it became evident that Bob**
723. **needed more care and a team of caregivers.**
724. **At the time, he had just gotten discharged**
725. **from the hospital to be sent to a nursing**
726. **home in Pittsfield 26 miles away from where**
727. **we live and 50-minute drive one way.**
728. **I visited him each day. The drive was**
729. **not only very time consuming, but I returned**
730. **every evening exhausted. I could not**
731. **continue with that, that's when with a lot**
732. **of help, I worked to get Bob moved to**
733. **Williamstown Commons Nursing and**
734. **Rehabilitation. This nursing home is five**
735. **minutes from home, ten minutes away for me.**
736. **I can get to him easily, and I'm able to see**
737. **him whenever I like or need to.**
738. **I can't say enough about this local**
739. **health care resource. I've been so happy**
740. **with our experience at Williamstown Common.**
741. **The staff there treats the residents and**
742. **family like their own family.**
743. **The residents of Northern Berkshire**
744. **County, including myself, are happy to know**
745. **that North Adams Regional Hospital will be**
746. **returning services to our region. That's**
747. **truly good news.**
748. **What I wonder about is if the community**
749. **understands the impact the reinvigoration of**
750. **the hospital will have to other health care**
751. **services in this region. This includes**
752. **nursing homes. The ability of the hospital**
753. **to swing medical surgical beds to nursing**
754. **home beds has the potential to destabilize**
755. **nursing homes in this area.**
756. **If these facilities cannot sustain**
757. **themselves to swing beds, it will create an**
758. **access issue for residents of Northern**
759. **Berkshire County. It will require them to**
760. **travel almost an hour away to see their**
761. **loved ones. I worry that most people won't**
762. **realize the importance of nursing home**
763. **access until it's too late and the services**
764. **are significantly reduced or not present at**
765. **all in our community.**
766. **We need these centers to survive and**
767. **thrive. The thought of not being able to**
768. **see my husband is devastating, but I know**
769. **that I don't want to go back to what I went**
770. **through in 2021. I ask you to reconsider**
771. **measures designed to help stabilize all**
772. **parts of healthcare services in Northern**
773. **Berkshire county, including nursing homes.**
774. **Please do not put these important vital**
775. **centers at risk.**
776. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
777. **we have the next speaker, please.**
778. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
779. **Patrick Borek. Your line is open.**
780. **MR. RENAUD: Good evening. I'm Pat**
781. **Borek. I'm a resident of Dalton,**
782. **Massachusetts. As the Vice President for**
783. **Human Resources for Berkshire Health**
784. **Systems, I'm well aware of the challenges**
785. **and opportunities inherent in maintaining**
786. **our healthcare workforce in our region.**
787. **The decision to reopen the North Adams**
788. **Hospital as a critical access hospital**
789. **offers our community an exciting opportunity**
790. **for economic growth and career advancement.**
791. **We have estimated that the North Adams**
792. **critical access hospital project will create**
793. **between 60 and 70 new positions on the North**
794. **Adams campus. This is a significant boost**
795. **to our local employment landscape and**
796. **represents a growth of about 37 percent on**
797. **the North Adams campus.**
798. **These positions span a range of roles,**
799. **many of which are included in SEIU and MNA**
800. **bargaining units. I'm pleased to share that**
801. **we are in full agreement with both unions,**
802. **that the existing bargaining units and**
803. **associated labor agreements will remain in**
804. **place.**
805. **Therefore, we'll continue to honor the**
806. **existing labor agreements at this campus**
807. **with respect to new staff and new positions**
808. **in these bargaining units. We have been**
809. **meeting with both unions to discuss changes,**
810. **provide information and gain input and**
811. **suggestions on the transition as we move**
812. **forward.**
813. **One of the great benefits of this**
814. **project is the opportunity it presents for**
815. **our employees. We expect that a number of**
816. **current employees who live in North**
817. **Berkshire and previously worked for the**
818. **North Adams Regional Hospital will apply for**
819. **internal transfers in order to work closer**
820. **to home. This type of transfer will help**
821. **ensure that BHS high standards will be**
822. **reflected throughout our system. Working**
823. **closer to home not only reduces commute**
824. **times, but enhances work-life balance.**
825. **We've also seen former employees drawn**
826. **by the prospect of serving their community**
827. **consider coming out of retirement or**
828. **postponing their retirement plans. This not**
829. **only augments our workforce, but also brings**
830. **a wealth of experience back into our fold.**
831. **Furthermore, our commitment to the**
832. **community goes beyond immediate health care**
833. **needs . We're incredibly proud of our**
834. **portfolio of career pathway programs that**
835. **are designed to reduce barriers to**
836. **employment by helping to recruit and train**
837. **the region's skilled healthcare workforce**
838. **from within our very own community.**
839. **Conducted in partnership with local**
840. **educational institutions, specifically**
     1. **Berkshire Community College, the**
     2. **Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and**
     3. **the McCann Technical School, the career**
     4. **pathway programs are working to train**
     5. **nursing assistants, registered nurses who**
     6. **are trained to deliver a hospital level of**
     7. **care rather than a skilled nursing facility**
     8. **level of care, LPNs, medical assistants,**
     9. **imaging technologists, respiratory**
     10. **therapists, and more.**
     11. **These programs not only develop a**
     12. **pipeline of skilled healthcare workers, but**
     13. **give trainees access to an entire career**
     14. **path in healthcare, one that is accompanied**
     15. **by strong opportunities for advancement,**
     16. **competitive wages, which are set at the**
     17. **market median, and robust benefits.**
     18. **By creating employment opportunities**
     19. **and strengthening educational partnerships**
     20. **through the North Adams critical access**
     21. **hospitals project, we're investing in both**
     22. **the sustainability of health care and the**
     23. **economic growth of Berkshire County. Thank**
     24. **you.**
         1. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. As a reminder,**
         2. **if you would like to testify, please press**
         3. **Star 1. Operator, may we have the next**
         4. **speaker, please.**
         5. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Dr.**
         6. **Jason Ogiste. Your line is open.**
         7. **MR. OGISTE: Thank you. Good evening.**
         8. **This is Dr. Jason Ogiste, resident of**
         9. **Cheshire and urologic surgeon at Berkshire**
         10. **health systems. I'm also the medical**
         11. **director of surgical specialty practices for**
         12. **the BHS Medical Group.**
         13. **The absence of a dedicated health care**
         14. **facility in North Adams and the Northern**
         15. **Berkshires has had tangible repercussions.**
         16. **One of the most evident is in the realm of**
         17. **surgical care. Without a local facility,**
         18. **our community members have often found**
         19. **themselves going undiagnosed or untreated**
         20. **for long periods of time because they don't**
         21. **want to travel for care or putting off**
         22. **surgery due to the complicated and**
         23. **inconvenient travel arrangements necessary**
         24. **when scheduling an out-of-town procedure.**
             1. **As a surgeon, I have seen firsthand the**
             2. **clinical toll lack of access takes on many**
             3. **rural patients and their families. I have**
             4. **experienced patients from rural communities**
             5. **like ours arriving septic, clinically**
             6. **unstable, or without -- or with acute bleeds**
             7. **and becoming sicker by the minute. The BHS**
             8. **proposal aims to address these issues**
             9. **directly. With a reintroduction of the**
             10. **North Adams facility, BHS can offer expanded**
             11. **surgical services right at the community's**
             12. **doorstep.**
             13. **More importantly, these services will**
             14. **be complemented by backup inpatient care,**
             15. **ensuring a comprehensive approach. This not**
             16. **only facilitates timely interventions but**
             17. **also ensures that patients have necessary**
             18. **post-surgical care immediately available.**
             19. **The efficiency that this project**
             20. **promises is significant. Having the**
             21. **capability to provide inpatient and**
             22. **outpatient surgical care in North Adams for**
             23. **surrounding communities, streamlines both**
             24. **the patient's journey and the clinical**
841. **provider's experience. It reduces wait**
842. **times, ensures continuity of care, and**
843. **fundamentally transforms the health care**
844. **experience for both community members and**
845. **the healthcare professionals who serve them.**
846. **Furthermore, it has the potential to**
847. **help recruit and retain surgeons to our**
848. **area. As a surgeon myself, I can attest**
849. **that we always prefer to operate in the same**
850. **location where our patients can receive**
851. **inpatient surgical care, which allows for**
852. **optimal care coordination. This project is**
853. **a step towards a more proactive, efficient,**
854. **and patient centric health care model for**
855. **North Adams and Northern Berkshires as a**
856. **whole.**
857. **I stand firmly behind this vision and**
858. **urge you to consider its profound impact on**
859. **our community's health. Thank you for your**
860. **time and attention.**
861. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
862. **we have the next speaker, please.**
863. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
864. **Charles Redd. Your line is open.**
     1. **MR. REDD: Good evening, everyone. My**
     2. **name is Charles Redd. I'm a resident of**
     3. **Butler, Massachusetts, and I am proud to**
     4. **serve as Berkshire Health System's first**
     5. **officer of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.**
     6. **Our BHS mission, which was adopted by**
     7. **our board in 2021, is at its core a**
     8. **commitment to DEI to advance health and**
     9. **wellness for everyone in our community. Our**
     10. **commitment to the Northern Berkshire**
     11. **community with its high level of poverty and**
     12. **an aging population with many chronic**
     13. **illnesses is unwavering.**
     14. **While we understand that a signal**
     15. **initiative won't dissolve the deep-rooted**
     16. **health disparities overnight, the reopening**
     17. **of North Adams Regional Hospital as a**
     18. **critical access hospital is an integral step**
     19. **to this journey.**
     20. **We plan to use the hospital as a touch**
     21. **point for screening and addressing social**
     22. **determinants of health, the broader**
     23. **socioeconomic and environmental factors that**
     24. **impact health, such as housing, economic**
865. **stability, and transportation. This**
866. **proactive step can guide our community**
867. **members to the resources they need, thereby**
868. **enhancing the overall well-being.**
869. **We have also committed to collecting**
870. **and analyzing patient data at the new North**
871. **Adams Regional Hospital. By doing so, we**
872. **will be better equipped to recognize**
873. **patterns, understand the unique health**
874. **challenges of our community and tailor our**
875. **interventions accordingly. This data will**
876. **serve as the foundation for our targeted**
877. **health equity initiatives.**
878. **Lastly, the hospital will be a catalyst**
879. **for extending our reach into the community.**
880. **By fostering partnerships and rolling out**
881. **education and outreach programs, we aim to**
882. **address the most pressing health challenges,**
883. **especially in areas like chronic disease and**
884. **substance use disorder.**
885. **The North Adams project is a testament**
886. **to our dedication to expanding access to**
887. **care, especially in regions like North Adams**
888. **that face heightened challenges. It is a**
889. **chance to address barriers, enhance access,**
890. **and take another step on our long journey**
891. **towards health equity. Thank you.**
892. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. If you are**
893. **having difficulty getting into the queue,**
894. **you can try hanging up and calling back in**
895. **and that might allow you to enter the queue.**
896. **And as a reminder, if you would like to**
897. **testify, please press Star 1.**
898. **Operator, can we have the next speaker**
899. **please. Thank you.**
900. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
901. **Amber Besaw. Your line is open.**
902. **MS. BESAW: Hello, everyone. I'm Amber**
903. **Besaw, the Executive Director of the**
904. **Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and**
905. **resident of North Adams.**
906. **At NBCC health and wellness is one of**
907. **our central areas of focus in our work to**
908. **achieve our mission of empowering the**
909. **members of our Northern Berkshire region to**
910. **enhance the quality of their lives. We are**
911. **encouraged by the possibility of an**
912. **inpatient care once again being available in**
913. **a new North Adams Regional Hospital, a place**
914. **that would be welcoming and accessible to**
915. **all members of our community.**
916. **This project would be a significant**
917. **step by Berkshire Health Systems towards**
918. **bridging health care gaps and providing**
919. **essential support for families and**
920. **individuals in our community across the life**
921. **span who struggle with generational poverty,**
922. **systemic barriers to health care,**
923. **transportation issues, food insecurity,**
924. **homelessness, substance use disorder, and**
925. **domestic violence.**
926. **Additionally, for members of our**
927. **community who are living into the later**
928. **years of their lives, access to health care**
929. **in their home community can mean so much for**
930. **them and their families, extending the**
931. **continuum of care that they can find close**
932. **to home. For these families and individuals**
933. **having access to local quality health care**
934. **can be often life changing.**
935. **Berkshire Health Systems' commitment to**
936. **community partnership aligns with our**
937. **mission, and we look forward to working even**
938. **more closely together to create a cohesive**
939. **supportive environment for our community**
940. **members.**
941. **On behalf of the Northern Berkshire**
942. **Community Coalition, we look forward to**
943. **collaborating with Berkshire Health Systems**
944. **and other community partners to support the**
945. **project to open the new North Adams Regional**
946. **Hospital and strive to make our shared**
947. **vision of a thriving Northern Berkshire**
948. **region become a reality. Thank you for your**
949. **time and consideration.**
950. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
951. **we have the next speaker, please.**
952. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
953. **Scott St. George. Your line is open.**
954. **MR. ST. GEORGE: Yes, hi, good evening.**
955. **This is Scott St. George. I'm a resident of**
956. **Richmond, Massachusetts, and I serve as**
957. **Chief Financial Officer at Berkshire Health**
958. **Systems.**
959. **As we move forward with a proposal to**
960. **reestablish North Adams Regional Hospital, I**
961. **want to highlight the dedication BHS has**
962. **shown in ensuring both the viability and**
963. **sustainability of health care in our region.**
964. **This initiative is a testament to our**
965. **commitment to stewardship, ensuring we**
966. **utilize resources wisely and effectively for**
967. **the betterment of our community.**
968. **For the past 10 years since the**
969. **bankruptcy and closure of the former North**
970. **Adams Hospital, we have consistently worked**
971. **in a proactive, creative manner to ensure**
972. **that the residents of North County have**
973. **access to high quality care right at their**
974. **doorstep.**
975. **We have done this through the North**
976. **County Campus of BMC where we have provided**
977. **24/7 emergency care and other outpatient**
978. **services since shortly after North Adams**
979. **closed. And now recent changes in the**
980. **critical access hospital designation have**
981. **opened a door for us making inpatient beds**
982. **in North Adams a new reality.**
983. **The opportunity to implement the**
984. **critical access hospital designation would**
985. **enable us to be self-sufficient and provide**
986. **the full continuum of care. Based on the**
987. **community demographics and our understanding**
988. **of the current patient panel in Northern**
989. **Berkshire, we estimate that a significant**
990. **portion of the patients we expect to serve**
991. **in North Adams would be beneficiaries of**
992. **Medicare and Medicaid.**
993. **Our commitment to these especially**
994. **vulnerable populations is unwavering. By**
995. **bringing inpatient care closer to them, we**
996. **aim to improve health outcomes, reduce re-**
997. **admissions and prevent adverse health**
998. **events. This approach not only enhances the**
999. **quality of care our patients receive but**
1000. **also offers higher value care in the long**
1001. **run.**
1002. **In conclusion, at BHS, our focus has**
1003. **always been on balancing the immediate needs**
1004. **of our community with the long-term**
1005. **sustainability of health care in the region.**
1006. **This project exemplifies our commitment to**
1007. **that goal, and I'm confident that with the**
1008. **support of this community and the hard work**
1009. **of our BHS team, we will continue to elevate**
1010. **the standard of care in North Adams and the**
1011. **broader Northern Berkshire area. Thank you**
1012. **very much.**
1013. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
1014. **we have the next speaker, please.**
1015. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
1016. **Diane Spina. Your line is open.**
1017. **MS. SPINA: Hi, yes, hello. My name is**
1018. **Diane Spina. I'm the union delegate of the**
1019. **former North Adams Hospital, and I'm also a**
1020. **phlebotomist there in the lab.**
1021. **Opening this hospital is very vital to**
1022. **prevent suffering and provide faster**
1023. **treatment with physicians on hand with the**
1024. **experience needed that you cannot get at**
1025. **other agencies. I had to experience this**
1026. **nightmare firsthand with my own mother in**
1027. **respiratory failure.**
1028. **Please take a moment to reflect and**
1029. **remember this closing of the hospital was**
1030. **not the community's choice. There are**
1031. **numerous reasons people refuse to go to**
1032. **another hospital a distance away from home**
1033. **even if those reasons don't seem clear to**
1034. **those of us who do not agree. Please**
1035. **consider the following in the case of a**
1036. **patient having to travel to another hospital**
1037. **not close by, each mile traveled is a mile**
1038. **of suffering chest pain, abdominal pain,**
1039. **respiratory issues from serious injuries.**
1040. **Imagine the horror of this pain.**
1041. **The amount of drug addiction in**
1042. **Berkshire County is overwhelming, and a**
1043. **close-by hospital could save lives.**
1044. **Suicidal patients, mentally depressed,**
1045. **special needs will benefit from overnight**
1046. **observation and receive immediate attention**
1047. **without the delay of communications to**
1048. **another hospital.**
1049. **Many patients will and do refuse**
1050. **treatment further away from their home**
1051. **because they have a pet they cherish and**
1052. **will not leave that pet because they have no**
1053. **one to turn to or trust to care for their**
1054. **pet companion. Likewise, they don't have**
1055. **anyone to care for perhaps a special needs**
1056. **adult that they are carrying for.**
      1. **Many patients refuse because of the**
      2. **fear that they are a distance too far away**
      3. **from immediate family members to get them --**
      4. **to get to them if there's a problem at the**
      5. **hospital and not if they need -- to get to**
      6. **the hospital right away, family members**
      7. **can't also when they have a loved one a**
      8. **distance away.**
      9. **Insurances, too, sometimes also a**
      10. **person can afford is an expensive insurance.**
      11. **This is a serious issue. An ambulance ride**
      12. **to North Adams Regional and an ambulance**
      13. **ride to Pittsfield are very different costs,**
      14. **and money owed can cause financial ruin for**
      15. **the patient.**
      16. **Community Services, such as our EMTs,**
      17. **our policemen, our firemen, while they're**
      18. **serving the community may become injured.**
      19. **They should not have to travel all the way**
      20. **to Pittsfield either. We should have a**
      21. **place where they can go immediately for**
      22. **treatment.**
      23. **Approval of this application will**
      24. **provide more employment opportunities. It**
1057. **will better serve the large population of**
1058. **elderly that we have in the community.**
1059. **Elderly living in the area nursing homes and**
1060. **elderly housing will receive treatment**
1061. **without all the delays of going to another**
1062. **facility further away, including delays with**
1063. **documentation, communication from one person**
1064. **to many others. Thank you.**
1065. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
1066. **we have the next speaker, please.**
1067. **THE OPERATOR: Yes, the next speaker is**
1068. **Marie Harpin. Your line is open.**
1069. **MS. HARPIN: Hello, everyone. My name**
1070. **is Marie Harpin. I'm a resident of North**
1071. **Adams and also a North Adams city councilor.**
1072. **I would like to share some of my personal**
1073. **experiences with accessing health care in**
1074. **our area and emphasize how valuable it is to**
1075. **have health care close to home.**
1076. **My mom, Mimi Harpin, is 85 years old.**
1077. **She is a native of North Adams and very**
1078. **involved in the community as a leader**
1079. **throughout her life. Over the years, she**
1080. **has had various health issues, and my**
1081. **siblings and I have taken on the role of**
1082. **caregivers. North Adams Regional Hospital**
1083. **was the only hospital where my mom had ever**
1084. **received care. And when it closed in 2014,**
1085. **it felt like it was detrimental to her well-**
1086. **being.**
1087. **Over the past 10 years, she has**
1088. **experienced several emergencies that have**
1089. **required trips to the emergency room and**
1090. **hospital stays. And it is honestly been**
1091. **very difficult to get her to agree to go for**
1092. **care since North Adams Regional Hospital**
1093. **closed.**
1094. **At first she protested and said she was**
1095. **simply not going. She eventually agreed to**
1096. **getting the care she needed because she knew**
1097. **she had to, but it definitely took her time**
1098. **to adjust. This past August, mom went to**
1099. **the emergency department on the North Adams**
1100. **campus. She received great care there, but**
1101. **ended up needing to be admitted for a few**
1102. **days, so she was transferred to Berkshire**
1103. **Medical Center in Pittsfield.**
1104. **For my siblings and me, it's really**
      1. **difficult to get down to BMC. I work for**
      2. **Avangrid, an energy company, and I work at**
      3. **two different sites in Northern Berkshire**
      4. **and Southern Vermont. To visit my mom in**
      5. **the hospital in Pittsfield, I typically need**
      6. **to take a day off of work or at least a half**
      7. **a day off of work, which is really**
      8. **challenging to me.**
      9. **The prospect of having inpatient care**
      10. **right in North Adams would be amazing for me**
      11. **and my siblings. It would be a lot easier**
      12. **to visit my mom, bring her the things that**
      13. **she needs, and coordinate with her doctors**
      14. **and her care team. Being in a familiar**
      15. **environment would also help to relieve some**
      16. **of the anxieties that she feels when dealing**
      17. **with her health challenges. It will be**
      18. **comforting both to her and to us to know**
      19. **that she was nearby.**
      20. **My mom wanted me to mention having beds**
      21. **in North Adams will give better health**
      22. **access to the elderly because transportation**
      23. **to Pittsfield is a major problem for many of**
      24. **us in Northern Berkshire. Northern**
1105. **Berkshire is an aging community, and I**
1106. **strongly believe that our experience is not**
1107. **unique. There are a lot of people out there**
1108. **like me, and there are a lot of people like**
1109. **my mom, and for some, traveling to**
1110. **Pittsfield is not an accessible option due**
1111. **to transportation, winter weather or other**
1112. **challenges.**
1113. **Bringing inpatient beds back to North**
1114. **Adams means that more families like mine can**
1115. **be present both physically and emotionally**
1116. **during some of life's most challenging**
1117. **moments. Thank you for considering the deep**
1118. **impact this project will have on families**
1119. **throughout our community.**
1120. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,**
1121. **maybe we have the next speaker, please.**
1122. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Bill**
1123. **Jones. Your line is open.**
1124. **MR. JONES: Good evening, Director**
1125. **Renaud. My name is Bill Jones, and I'm the**
1126. **President and CEO of Integritus Healthcare.**
1127. **We are the largest not-for-profit provider**
1128. **of senior living nursing home and hospice**
1129. **services in the Commonwealth, and we're**
1130. **based here in Berkshire County. Our mission**
1131. **statement speaks to the commitment**
1132. **purposeful work we do each day, and I've had**
1133. **the privilege of being part of this**
1134. **organization for 35 years.**
1135. **We, too, support the reopening of the**
1136. **hospital. Yet, we also know that health**
1137. **care policy often comes with nuances that**
1138. **are invariably complex. That is certainly**
1139. **the case here. We have concerns for the**
1140. **unintended consequences the CAH designation**
1141. **will have on nursing homes.**
1142. **To recap, the complexities that reveal**
1143. **themselves in the DoN filing and in critical**
1144. **access policy pertain to the use of nursing**
1145. **home swing beds, reimbursement for those**
1146. **swing beds at cost plus a profit, and that**
1147. **other nursing homes in Northern Berkshire**
1148. **are not entitled to this reimbursement**
1149. **benefit. In fact, in contrast, nursing**
1150. **homes are not reimbursed fully by Medicaid.**
1151. **In 2022, the shortfall was $4.7 million**
1152. **in Northern Berkshire alone. Think about**
1153. **that for a minute. One nursing home will be**
1154. **reimbursed at cost plus a profit while the**
1155. **other two in the same market will be**
1156. **reimbursed less than their costs. This**
1157. **disparity must be addressed and corrected.**
1158. **Absent that, the combination of this**
1159. **enhanced reimbursement coupled with the**
1160. **ability to swing bed use as a nursing home**
1161. **presents a real threat to the viability of**
1162. **nursing homes in Northern Berkshire.**
1163. **Williamstown and North Adams Commons**
1164. **are high-quality providers serving their**
1165. **communities for over 59 years. They are**
1166. **home to 225 frail, medically complex**
1167. **residents from our community. They don't**
1168. **want to travel outside of Northern Berkshire**
1169. **for their nursing home care. Access to this**
1170. **part of the continuum is critical for this**
1171. **rural part of Massachusetts.**
1172. **As noted, Medicaid under funds costs**
1173. **for long-term care in nursing homes.**
1174. **Medicare revenues fund that shortfall. We**
1175. **believe that the swing-bed policy will shift**
1176. **Medicare revenues from our nursing homes and**
1177. **undermine the safety net provided for long-**
1178. **term care residents. In conjunction with**
1179. **the swing-bed reimbursement disadvantage,**
1180. **I'm concerned about our ability to maintain**
1181. **access to nursing homes in Northern**
1182. **Berkshire.**
1183. **An associated concern is the shortage**
1184. **of nursing and ancillary staff. Current**
1185. **vacancy rates suggests the need to recruit**
1186. **up to 250 nurses and aides in our Berkshire**
1187. **County nursing homes. While we're making**
1188. **considerable investments in the pipeline for**
1189. **aides and licensed staff, these efforts will**
1190. **take time and money to bear fruit.**
1191. **We are concerned about our ability to**
1192. **recruit and retain staff in an environment**
1193. **that includes critical access designation**
1194. **only to the new acute-care hospital. This**
1195. **labor attrition coupled with the revenue**
1196. **deficit will likely undermine our ability to**
1197. **deliver high-quality nursing care that the**
1198. **community has relied on for so many years.**
1199. **Thank you for your time this evening**
1200. **and for the opportunity to testify. It is**
1201. **our hope that this process will lead to**
1202. **further discussion and solutions that ensure**
1203. **the broader continuum is not destabilized as**
1204. **a result of critical access policies. Thank**
1205. **you.**
1206. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
1207. **we have our next speaker, please.**
1208. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Ryan**
1209. **Cuthbertson. Your line is open.**
1210. **MR. CUTHBERTSON: Good evening. I'm**
1211. **Ryan Cuthbertson of Hooper, Lundy and**
1212. **Bookman speaking on behalf of the**
1213. **Massachusetts Senior Care Association.**
1214. **We've now heard from some long-term**
1215. **care operational experts and families**
1216. **voicing great concern over the impact that**
1217. **the proposed project will have on the**
1218. **regional long-term care system. We have not**
1219. **heard, and I doubt that we will hear, anyone**
1220. **opposing the project in its entirety or**
1221. **diminishing its necessity. What we have**
1222. **heard is that the project parameters as**
1223. **described in the DoN application will**
1224. **jeopardize access to critical long-term care**
1225. **services for the region's residents and**
1226. **family members.**
1227. **In the applicant's community engagement**
1228. **presentation, it says that healthcare is a**
1229. **balancing act, balancing the needs of the**
1230. **community against financial sustainability.**
1231. **The applicant stressed to the community that**
1232. **it is, quote/unquote, "always working to**
1233. **maintain this balance so that we can advance**
1234. **health and wellness for our whole**
1235. **community." Had the applicant's community**
1236. **engagement efforts included other key**
1237. **stakeholders such as local long-term care**
1238. **providers, we would have received valuable**
1239. **insight into the role of those providers in**
1240. **maintaining that community-wide balance.**
1241. **It is clear that Berkshire County**
1242. **contains an ever increasingly sick and aging**
1243. **population whose needs extend beyond just**
1244. **acute care. Long-term care is another**
1245. **critical and irreplaceable function on the**
1246. **healthcare continuum for these residents.**
1247. **Though it is clear that maximizing the**
1248. **number of lucrative swing beds addresses the**
1249. **applicant's financial sustainability, it**
1250. **would come at a cost of sacrificing the**
1251. **needs of the community by hampering access**
1252. **to critical long-term care services.**
1253. **The Massachusetts Senior Care**
1254. **Association on behalf of its members is**
1255. **therefore respectfully requesting that this**
1256. **project be approved only with certain**
1257. **important conditions aimed to sustain the**
1258. **balance of the healthcare ecosystem in**
1259. **Berkshire County. These conditions are**
1260. **intended to address both of the major issues**
1261. **that would exacerbate the long-term care**
1262. **access problem, financial impact and**
1263. **staffing.**
1264. **To address the financial harm to the**
1265. **local long-term care facilities, we request**
1266. **that the number of beds authorized for**
1267. **swing-bed designation be capped at two beds.**
1268. **This would mitigate harm to the local post-**
1269. **acute and long-term care infrastructure**
1270. **while still allowing the ability to provide**
1271. **adequate post-acute care at the hospital**
1272. **location.**
      1. **To address the seemingly inevitable**
      2. **impact to the already strained staffing**
      3. **resources at area SNFs, we request that the**
      4. **applicant agree not to actively solicit**
      5. **clinical or ancillary staff in skilled**
      6. **nursing facilities located within a 25-mile**
      7. **radius of the hospital effective from the**
      8. **date of DoN approval and continuing for two**
      9. **years after the hospital commences**
      10. **operations.**
      11. **This will provide a reasonable**
      12. **transition period for the SNFs to plan for**
      13. **and mitigate staffing impact and avoid a**
      14. **devastatingly abrupt staff exodus that would**
      15. **immediately threaten SNF's capacity in the**
      16. **area.**
      17. **The hospital would still have access to**
      18. **existing staff and the use of fixed contract**
      19. **staffing arrangements, which are now common**
      20. **among healthcare facilities given unabated**
      21. **staffing shortages, but are more challenging**
      22. **for SNFs to use with noted financial**
      23. **disparity.**
      24. **Additionally, we request that the**
          1. **Health Policy Commission conduct a cost of**
          2. **impact market review in connection with the**
          3. **proposed project. It seems that everyone**
          4. **can agree on the merits of the underlying**
          5. **need of the project.**
          6. **We are just asking you consider in your**
          7. **analysis the factors one and two related to**
          8. **the Commonwealth's broader objectives for**
          9. **improving public health outcomes and**
          10. **continuity and coordination of care and the**
          11. **potential inadvertent upset to the community**
          12. **health care infrastructure in Berkshire**
          13. **County as a whole by imposing these**
          14. **conditions on the proposed project.**
          15. **Thank you very much for your time and**
          16. **attention.**
          17. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
          18. **we have the next speaker, please.**
          19. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is John**
          20. **Meaney. Your line is open.**
          21. **MR. MEANEY: Good evening. My name is**
          22. **John Meaney. I'm a resident of North Adams,**
          23. **and I have the privilege of serving the**
          24. **community as the chief and general manager**
1273. **of Northern Berkshire EMS, the sole provider**
1274. **of emergency medical services for 10**
1275. **municipalities in the Northern Berkshire,**
1276. **Southern Vermont region.**
1277. **As someone who's dedicated his life to**
1278. **ensuring the timely and effective delivery**
1279. **of emergency care, I can't overstate the**
1280. **significance of having care resources close**
1281. **to home, both for our emergency medical**
1282. **service providers, and for our community as**
1283. **a whole.**
1284. **In my role, I see firsthand our EMS**
1285. **teams working tirelessly to respond to**
1286. **emergencies. Our goal is always to provide**
1287. **the best care as quickly as possible. With**
1288. **a critical access hospital right here in**
1289. **North Adams, we can drastically reduce**
1290. **transport time ensuring that patients**
1291. **receive care faster and more efficiently.**
1292. **This not only improves outcomes, but also**
1293. **allows our EMS teams to be ready for the**
1294. **next call sooner, bolstering our community's**
1295. **overall safety and system status management**
1296. **of our resources.**
      1. **The opportunity that the local**
      2. **inpatient hospital offers for increased**
      3. **efficiency of our operation has the**
      4. **potential to make a significant impact on**
      5. **Northern Berkshire EMS and our ability to**
      6. **serve the community. Fewer hour-and-a-half**
      7. **to two-hour round-trips to connect patients**
      8. **to inpatient care at Berkshire Medical**
      9. **Center in Pittsfield will reduce wear and**
      10. **tear on our vehicles and equipment, keep**
      11. **staff and patients safer during poor winter**
      12. **weather conditions, and allow us at Northern**
      13. **Berkshire EMS to instead direct our**
      14. **resources to ongoing systems improvement.**
      15. **We are also excited about how the**
      16. **availability of inpatient care at a critical**
      17. **access hospital in North Adams would better**
      18. **support patients requiring IV therapy and**
      19. **other treatment. At present we are**
      20. **responsible for transporting patients with**
      21. **certain diagnoses from their nursing home to**
      22. **a hospital facility by ambulance to receive**
      23. **their treatment.**
      24. **Being able to care for these patients**
          1. **in swing beds onsite at the hospital would**
          2. **be a game changer both for the patient and**
          3. **for Northern Berkshire EMS. Instead of**
          4. **transporting patients back and forth, they**
          5. **would receive continuous care in a single**
          6. **familiar location and free up Northern**
          7. **Berkshire EMS to respond to acute**
          8. **emergencies more quickly.**
          9. **I wholeheartedly support this project,**
          10. **and I urge everyone to recognize the immense**
          11. **benefit it will bring to our EMS services in**
          12. **the broader Northern Berkshire community. I**
          13. **thank you for your time and consideration.**
          14. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
          15. **we have the next speaker, please.**
          16. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
          17. **Elizabeth Daley. Your line is open.**
          18. **MS. DALEY: Thank you. My name is**
          19. **Elizabeth Daley. I'm a resident of Lynn,**
          20. **Massachusetts, which since the closure of**
          21. **Union Hospital has become the largest**
          22. **municipality in Massachusetts without a**
          23. **local hospital.**
          24. **I'm a member of the 1199 SEIU Ten**
              1. **Taxpayer Group and a member of SEIU, and**
              2. **SEIU 1199 has represented the workers of the**
              3. **former North Adams Regional Hospital, and we**
              4. **have continued to represent the workers at**
              5. **the North Campus since North Adams closed.**
              6. **We will submit additional comments in**
              7. **writing, but I just want to say tonight that**
              8. **we are fully in support of the reopening of**
              9. **North Adams Regional Hospital and are glad**
              10. **to see that workers will continue to have a**
              11. **seat at the table and a voice on the job in**
              12. **this new venture. Thank you.**
              13. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may**
              14. **we have the next speaker, please.**
              15. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Jodi**
              16. **Ouimette. Your line is open.**
              17. **MS. OUIMETTE: Hi, thank you for taking**
              18. **the time for letting us take the time to**
              19. **speak. I am the administrator at Mount**
              20. **Carmel Care Center which is a skilled**
              21. **nursing facility in Berkshire County, and I**
              22. **have worked in Northern Berkshire County as**
              23. **well.**
              24. **I want to say that I do support the**
                  1. **efforts of providing surgical care and**
                  2. **services to those with opioid disorders and**
                  3. **that I do recognize the transportation**
                  4. **issues with not -- with having a closure in**
                  5. **North Adams, so I fully support the cause**
                  6. **itself. I just ask that we do have some**
                  7. **consideration for other impacts on the**
                  8. **community and in particular with swing beds.**
                  9. **Speaking on behalf of Mount Carmel Care**
                  10. **Center, we're a 69-bed faith-based nonprofit**
                  11. **facility in Berkshire County, and we really**
                  12. **pride ourselves on our emphasis and**
                  13. **determination and drive and mission to**
                  14. **deliver compassionate loving care at the**
                  15. **highest standards of level -- level of care**
                  16. **with wise stewardship of our resources and**
                  17. **our mission and core values.**
                  18. **Dignity, compassion, shared**
                  19. **commitment, and sanctity of life are not**
                  20. **just the words that we put on a wall or on a**
                  21. **marketing site. They're really the values**
                  22. **that we hold dear in our hearts and that we**
                  23. **emphasize daily. And to sustain and grow**
                  24. **our mission value, we must ensure that the**
1297. **resources needed to carry through our**
1298. **mission are available. It is not about**
1299. **making a profit. It's about sustainability**
1300. **and providing high quality of care to those**
1301. **we serve.**
1302. **We provide a service to this community**
1303. **that many desire. In this there are both**
1304. **physical and spiritual -- both physical and**
1305. **spiritual needs. Our concern with this**
1306. **current DoN is they include the labor**
1307. **necessary to provide the quality of care**
1308. **that our residents deserve, the ability to**
1309. **achieve a (inaudible) that has been**
1310. **mentioned before Medicare, Medicaid, private**
1311. **insurance, to fund fair wages, and to**
1312. **attract quality staff, and fund the many**
1313. **expenses associated with maintaining a long-**
1314. **term care facility and offering choices to**
1315. **our residents who need post-acute care.**
1316. **Since the onset of the COVID-19**
1317. **pandemic, staffing has become a challenge,**
1318. **not just in Berkshire County but also across**
1319. **the Commonwealth. While the challenge**
1320. **exists across the state, our labor pool and**
1321. **our resident population in Berkshire County**
1322. **is limited in comparison to Central and**
1323. **Eastern Massachusetts.**
1324. **Given the reimbursement rates of**
1325. **skilled nursing facilities in comparison to**
1326. **hospitals and other health care**
1327. **environments, it is extremely difficult to**
1328. **provide a wage that both attracts and**
1329. **retains quality caregivers in the long term,**
1330. **so limiting swing beds we believe would help**
1331. **even the playing field.**
1332. **We also are concerned about resident**
1333. **choice, and much of our census comes from**
1334. **word of mouth community experience and**
1335. **spiritual -- and spiritual needs, and**
1336. **providing patients with the same beds at the**
1337. **hospital so that they can receive similar**
1338. **care at nursing facilities is a challenge**
1339. **for us nursing facilities.**
1340. **The thought of a hospital provides a**
1341. **higher level of acuity of care. In reality,**
1342. **we are all providing subacute care, so we**
1343. **ask that you have consideration for the**
1344. **number of swing beds available as we are**
1345. **already working under budget and under**
1346. **census stability.**
1347. **So I thank you for the opportunity to**
1348. **speak tonight and hope you consider some of**
1349. **those efforts to make it an even playing**
1350. **field while serving the entirety of the**
1351. **community. Thank you.**
1352. **MR. RENAUD: Operator, we have the next**
1353. **speaker, please.**
1354. **THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is**
1355. **Michelle Byron. Your line is open.**
1356. **MS. BYRON: Thank you. Good evening.**
1357. **My name is Michelle Byron. I was born and**
1358. **raised in North Berkshire County, and I am**
1359. **currently a resident of Adams.**
1360. **Both of my children were born at the**
1361. **Old North Adams Regional Hospital, but the**
1362. **most amount of time I've spent in our local**
1363. **health care facilities has been in caring**
1364. **for my elderly parents.**
1365. **After the hospital closed, the biggest**
1366. **problem was that we had to go to BMC in**
1367. **Pittsfield for inpatient care. It would**
1368. **have been so much more convenient to have a**
1369. **hospital right nearby, and what was more**
1370. **important, it was comforting to my parents**
1371. **to be in a hospital they were familiar with.**
1372. **Needing to go to the hospital is hard**
1373. **enough, but when they faced the knowledge**
1374. **that a hospital stay meant a trip to**
1375. **Pittsfield, it was even more overwhelming.**
1376. **Whether it was a urinary tract infection or**
1377. **a respiratory virus, traveling to BMC put a**
1378. **lot of extra stress on both them and us.**
1379. **My parents are now in a nursing home,**
1380. **but I myself am almost 72, and personally I**
1381. **would like to know that if I need hospital**
1382. **care, I could be taken care of in North**
1383. **Adams so that it would be easier on my**
1384. **family. I strongly support BHS's proposal**
1385. **to bring inpatient beds back to North Adams.**
1386. **Thank you for recognizing the value**
1387. **that reestablishing this care will have on**
1388. **our rural community. Thank you.**
1389. **MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, can**
1390. **I confirm that there are no other speakers**
1391. **in the queue?**
1392. **THE OPERATOR: There are no other**
      1. **speakers in the queue at this time.**
      2. **MR. RENAUD: Okay. It has been 35**
      3. **minutes since a speaker has signed -- a**
      4. **speaker has signed up to testify. We will**
      5. **keep the line open for a another five**
      6. **minutes, and if no one joins the queue, I**
      7. **will just have some closing statements at**
      8. **that time. Thank you.**
      9. **(Pause)**
      10. **MR. RENAUD: Good evening again. We**
      11. **have not had anyone now join the queue in 45**
      12. **minutes, so we will end the public hearing.**
      13. **As a reminder, written comments will be**
      14. **accepted through Monday, October 2 (sic),**
      15. **2023. Thank you for participating in the**
      16. **public hearing.**
      17. **Hold on one second, please. Operator,**
      18. **could you please let the next speaker in?**
      19. **(Pause)**
      20. **MR. RENAUD: Okay, this will officially**
      21. **end the public hearing again, and reminder,**
      22. **written comments will be accepted through**
      23. **Monday, October 2, 2023, and we appreciate**
      24. **your participation in the hearing. The**
1393. **hearing is now closed. Thank you.**
1394. **THE OPERATOR: This concludes today's**
1395. **conference. All participants may disconnect**
1396. **at this time.**
1397. **(Whereupon, public hearing was**
1398. **concluded at 7:33 p.m.)**

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1. **C E R T I F I C A T E**
2. **COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS**
3. **NORFOLK, SS.**

**4**

1. **I, Amy Marascio, a Professional Court Reporter**
2. **and Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of**
3. **Massachusetts, do hereby certify that the foregoing**
4. **telephonic public hearing was taken before me on**

**9 October 25, 2023.**

1. **The said telephonic public hearing was taken**
2. **audiographically by myself and then transcribed under**
3. **my direction. To the best of my knowledge, the within**
4. **transcript is a complete, true and accurate record of**
5. **said telephonic public hearing.**
6. **I am not connected by blood or marriage with any**
7. **of the said parties, nor interested directly or**
8. **indirectly in the matter in controversy.**
9. **In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **19** | **this** | **30th** | **day** | **of** | **October 2023.** |
| **20** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **21** |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | **<%28366,Signature%>** |
| **22** |  |  |  |  | **Amy Marascio, Notary Public** |
| **23** |  |  |  |  | **My Commission Expires:** |
| **24** |  |  |  |  | **May 31, 2030** |

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