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1	PROCEEDINGS
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

Page 5 1 by Berkshire Health Systems, Inc. 2 Upon receipt of the application, DoN 3 staff reviewed the application and after finding it to be in compliance with the DoN 4 5 statute and regulations filing assigned it a filing date of September 1, 2023. 6 This DoN 7 application is for Berkshire Health Systems, 8 Inc. 9 The enabling statute for the DoN 10 program requires that any person or 11 government agency intending to obtain an 12 original license as defined in the DoN 13 regulations must apply for DoN approval 14 before engaging in such a project. 15 I will now provide an overview of the 16 project description. The proposed project 17 will return 18 inpatient beds to the North 18 Adams Community. In addition to returning 19 inpatient services to the Northern Berkshire 20 community, the applicant will convert certain Berkshire Medical Center satellite 21 22 services including the BMC satellite 23 emergency facility to the North Adams 24 Regional Hospital license as part of the

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proposed project.

2 The re-imagined North Adams Regional 3 Hospital will have 18 medical surgical beds which will also be certified for use as 4 5 swing beds for subacute care, a four-room 6 mixed inpatient/outpatient surgical space 7 comprised of existing open and closed 8 operating and endoscopy rooms from the prior 9 hospital and current satellite facility as 10 well as imaging, emergency services and other outpatient services. The total value 11 of the proposed project based on the 12 13 national capital expenditure is \$2,850,000. 14 In accordance with the statute and 15 regulations governing the DoN process, the 16 DoN program is analyzing Berkshire Health 17 Systems' application for compliance with a 18 set of standards and criteria including, but 19 not limited to, a justification of the need 20 for the project, its planning process, 21 financial feasibility, environmental 22 impact, and the reasonableness of costs and 23 expenditures. These are the key criteria 24 which the DoN program will apply in its

analysis of the application.

This public hearing is an effort to gather information and to hear the opinions of interested parties about the proposed project. It is not intended to be a question and answer session. No questions will be permitted.

8 The DoN program will take all relevant 9 information into account in preparing its recommendation to the Massachusetts Public 10 Health Council, whose decision on whether to 11 improve the DoN for the proposed project 12 13 will be made at one of its upcoming monthly 14 meetings. We will accept written comments 15 on this application for 10 days following 16 this hearing.

17 As this is a virtual hearing, the 18 logistics are different from in-person 19 hearings. I will review our process for 20 today. We are learning the logistics of the 21 system as we go. We ask for your patience 22 if and when we encounter difficulties. We 23 will work to resolve any problems we 24 experience.

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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 speaking. This meeting is being recorded 4 and transcribed. Press Star 1 if you would 5 like to testify. This will put you in the 6 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

1 moderator will mute you and give the floor 2 to the next speaker. We may experience a 3 slight pause between speakers. If testimony is lengthy, we suggest you 4 5 present a three-minute summary of those remarks and submit a full text of your 6 7 comments in writing. If you have a written 8 copy of your comments, regardless of length, 9 please feel free to submit it to the 10 department by November 6 by email or via 11 postal service. Email us at 12 dph.don@state.ma.us. 13 Mail will get to us quickly if it is 14 sent to Determination of Need, Massachusetts 15 Department of Public Health, 67 Forest 16 Street, Marlborough, Massachusetts 01752. Be assured that the department will consider 17 18 all comments whether presented orally or in 19 writing. Whether you comment or not, please 20 know the Department greatly values and 21 appreciates your participation in the DoN 22 process. 23 Before we open the line to the general 24 public, the applicant will go first and will

1 be allotted four minutes to present 2 information about the proposed project. 3 Following the presentation, we will provide an opportunity for elected officials from 4 5 the community to comment and then begin 6 calling on those individuals who request to 7 speak this evening. I would now like to invite Darlene 8 9 Rodowicz, President and CEO of Berkshire 10 Health Systems, to make a brief statement on 11 the proposed project. Welcome Darlene. 12 MS. RODOWICZ: Thank you, Dennis. Good 13 evening, I'm Darlene Rodowicz, President and 14 CEO of Berkshire Health Systems. 15 On behalf of all of us at BHS, I would 16 like to thank Commissioner Goldstein and the 17 Massachusetts Department of Public Health 18 for giving us this opportunity to discuss 19 our vision to bring inpatient care back to 20 North Adams and the Northern Berkshire 21 community counties. 22 Our goal is to expand access to health 23 care in the underserved region of Northern 24 Berkshire. However, to understand the full

Page 11 implications of what this project really means for the community, I'd like to share a bit about North Adams and the overall health care landscape in the area. North Adams is a city that has worked hard to transcend its identity as an aging mill town. Despite advances in economic and cultural redevelopment, North Adams remains a community with significant health care needs. Many residents are seniors with

11 Many residents are seniors with 12 increasing health concerns and a large 13 portion of the community faces both 14 socioeconomic and health challenges relating 15 to substance use and limited opportunities 16 for economic advancement.

The abrupt closure of North Adams 17 18 Regional Hospital in 2014 didn't just result 19 in a loss of a hospital facility, it created 20 a region wide emergency that disrupted access to fundamental health care and caused 21 22 a broader disruption in the community's 23 well-being and economic stability. 24 The story of hospital closures

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1 impacting rural communities is not unique to 2 Berkshire County or even to Massachusetts. 3 Many national conversations around health care link challenges in access with 4 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 continuation of essential health services in 18 rural and underserved areas across the 19 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

1	help emploin why the ne empropries of Newth
1	help explain why the re-emergence of North
2	Adams Regional Hospital Corporation under
3	BHS leadership is so critical to our region.
4	First, Clinical Care: Returning inpatient
5	beds to North Adams under a CAH designation
6	will have clear impact on the accessibility
7	of care for patients, which in turn can
8	directly lead to improved health outcomes.
9	Our BHS physicians are excited about
10	the ways that a critical access hospital can
11	offer unique and flexible options for rural
12	patient care and focus much needed resources
13	on addressing the health challenges in our
14	community's most vulnerable residents.
15	Second, Social and Economic
16	Opportunities: For North Adams the
17	possibility of opening a critical access
18	hospital is a chance to help revitalize a
19	community. Our health system administrators
20	and community partners are eager to continue
21	enhancing our programs for education,
22	employment and health equity in ways that
23	will support growth and opportunities for
24	residents of North Adams and the surrounding

area.

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2	And the overwhelming community support
3	we've received including numerous letters
4	following our public meeting this past
5	summer underscores the shared community
6	understanding of the profound potential of
7	this project.
8	Third, Stewardship and Sustainability:
9	As you'll see from the data submitted with
10	our proposal, our Northern Berkshire
11	community needs an inpatient hospital. This
12	need was made clear at the time of the
13	hospital closure 10 years ago in the
14	Stroudwater report commissioned by the state
15	and remains true today.
16	Each facet of our proposal underscores
17	our commitment to addressing the public
18	health priorities of the Commonwealth of
19	Massachusetts, including ensuring that the
20	health care we provide is accessible,
21	sustainable, and of high value to the
22	public. BHS is committed to collaborating
23	with local, state and federal entities to
24	ensure the sustainability of health care in

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the region.

2	I hope you will agree that this project
3	offers us an exceptional opportunity to
4	address barriers to patient care, promote
5	social and economic improvement, and advance
6	the health and wellness of the Northern
7	Berkshire region and our entire community.
8	Thank you for your time and consideration.
9	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. We will begin
10	now by taking comments from invited elected
11	officials. Our first speaker will be Mayor
12	Jennifer Macksey, Mayor of North Adams.
13	MS. MACKSEY: Thank you, Dennis. Can
14	everyone hear me okay?
15	MR. RENAUD: Yes.
16	MS. MACKSEY: Okay. Good evening. My
17	name is Jennifer Macksey. I am a lifelong
18	resident of North Adams and the city's
19	mayor.
20	As mayor, I'm deeply committed to the
21	growth and well-being of North Adams, and I
22	strongly believe that the reopening of
23	inpatient care by BHS will have a positive
24	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

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you very much.

2 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Our next 3 speaker will be Massachusetts Senator Paul Mark. 4 MR. MARK: (Inaudible) state senator 5 for North Adams and Northern Berkshire 6 7 County and a total of 57 cities and towns 8 that make up the Berkshire, Hampden, 9 Franklin and Hampshire senate district. I'm 10 pleased to be here tonight to support the 11 proposed project and to reintroduce 12 inpatient care in North Adams. 13 I want to acknowledge Mayor Macksey, my 14 colleague Representative John Barrett, who's 15 also here tonight and shares representation 16 of North Adams and the surrounding 17 communities with me at the statehouse and 18 recognize his support along with that of 19 Massachusetts 1st District Congressman 20 Richard Neal. I'm honored to be working 21 with them every day to advocate for our 22 constituents and highlight the issues that 23 uniquely impact the rural communities of the 24 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

1 has dropped by double digits in the 10 year 2 period. MCLA, Massachusetts College of 3 Liberal Arts, has half the students today than it did 10 years ago, and our local 4 5 newspaper closed after 150 years. 6 Even after Berkshire Health Systems 7 reopened a satellite operation, we have 8 struggled, and we've not yet recovered. Α 9 large detriment to those looking to relocate 10 to Northern Berkshire County is not having a 11 critical access hospital. We have two 12 colleges, 3300 students less than eight 13 minutes away from this campus site. There 14 are several hundred athletes competing in 15 events over the course of the school year, 16 which raises concerns to those parents in 17 choosing the college for their children. 18 I was mayor when the administration of 19 the former North Adams Regional Hospital 20 decided not to move forward in seeking a 21 permanent designation as a critical access 22 hospital in 1988. If they hadn't made that 23 terrible decision, how much different would 24 the face of Northern Berkshire be today,

1	especially in regards to our economy.
2	Through the hard work of so many,
3	especially Congressman Richard Neal,
4	Berkshire Health Systems has invested over
5	along with Berkshire Health Systems has
6	invested over millions of dollars in the
7	North Adams campus. Northern Berkshire is
8	now on the cusp of having stable health care
9	in the region and being a catalyst in
10	reinvigorating the area economy.
11	I've made it a priority to champion the
12	needs of our community over the years
13	especially when it comes to health care. It
14	was one of the primary reasons that I
15	returned to elective office. I've worked
16	alongside the Berkshire delegation with
17	great success. We made our voices heard on
18	the state level as we fought to save
19	community hospitals throughout this area.
20	I want to acknowledge again U.S. Rep.
21	Richard Neal for his significant role in
22	bringing about federal changes to the
23	critical access hospital program that has
24	paved the way for this project to move

forward.

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2	I've been passionately fighting for the
3	return of this hospital for many years, and
4	I can assure you that this project isn't
5	just about health care. It's about
6	employment, economic growth, restoring the
7	heart of our community. I urge everyone to
8	support this project for a brighter future
9	for North Adams and the Northern Berkshire
10	area. Thank you.
11	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Congressman
12	Richard Neal has submitted written testimony
13	and that will be made available.
14	Massachusetts Representatives Committee,
15	Karen Kelly, intends to submit written
16	testimony as well.
17	We will now be taking comments from the
18	public. If you wish to speak at this time,
19	please hit Star 1 and follow the
20	instructions of the operator. Operator, may
21	we have our first speaker now please.
22	THE OPERATOR: The first speaker is
23	Alec Belman. Your line is open.
24	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, Berkshire Health Systems critical access 4 5 hospital in Great Barrington. I'm also an ex officio member of the BHS Board of 6 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 presented us with opportunities to innovate. 12 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 swing bed program, which allows critical 20

access hospitals to provide skilled nursing level care to patients who do not need hospital level of care but still have high acuity conditions. Patients benefit from

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1 staying in a familiar environment surrounded 2 This not only by a consistent care team. 3 enhances their care experience, but does so without imposing additional costs on the 4 5 system. 6 In my experience at Fairview, swing 7 beds have been an invaluable resource for 8 patients to have a convenient transitional 9 care option that is close to home. This 10 project will be able to offer similar value 11 to North County patients and will be 12 especially helpful to those with a high 13 level of health and social need who can 14 receive continuous care in one location that 15 spans both their acute and post-acute care 16 needs. 17 Additionally, at Berkshire Medical 18 Center, we routinely have patients with 19 delayed discharge due to the various 20 barriers to placement at a local post-acute 21 facility. Having the flexibility of swing 22 beds will enable us to continue providing 23 short-term care for those patients who are 24 eligible, getting them the right level of

1 care at the right time. 2 Being able to shift appropriate 3 patients to swing-bed status at a critical access hospital also helps preserve the 4 availability of acute inpatient resources at 5 Berkshire Medical Center for those with 6 7 higher level needs, an approach that CMS and DPH supported during the height of the COVID 8 9 crisis. 10 I wholeheartedly support this project 11 for creating a critical access hospital in North Adams and appreciate your 12 13 consideration. Thank you for your time. 14 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 15 we have the next speaker, please. 16 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Tara Gregorio. Your line is open. 17 18 MS. GREGORIO: Thank you. Good 19 evening. My name is Tara Gregorio, and on 20 behalf of the Mass. Senior Care Association, 21 we want to thank you for the opportunity to 22 testify. 23 Firstly, we support the intent of the 24 application as has been described by you,

1	the director, and later by Darlene to
2	increase the availability of acute-care
3	services for residents of Northern Berkshire
4	County. However, we are concerned that this
5	project will have unintended negative
6	consequences that will threaten both choice
7	and access to long-term care services in
8	Berkshire County just as demand for these
9	vital services is growing.
10	Specifically, we are concerned that
11	permitting the applicants to use all of its
12	18 acute-care beds as so-called swing beds
13	will put the 13 Berkshire County nursing
14	facilities at a disadvantage and may result
15	in nursing facility closures. Swing beds is
16	the term used to describe a hospital room
17	that can switch from inpatient acute-care
18	status to skilled nursing care status.
19	The use of swing beds has the practical
20	result of keeping patients who need skilled
21	nursing facility level of care in the
22	hospital instead of discharging to a local
23	nursing facility. This is sometimes
24	necessary when there are no nearby skilled

1 nursing facilities, but that is simply not 2 the case in Berkshire County. 3 Typically, this nursing facility level of care is funded by Medicare, which is 4 5 exactly the resident that nursing facilities 6 rely on to offset severely low Medicaid 7 underfunding. The irrefutable data and 8 facts are that nursing facilities with less 9 Medicare revenue are more likely to close, 10 experience lower staffing levels, and poorer 11 outcomes. 12 To add to this, we are concerned that 13 our already scarce and invaluable clinical 14 ancillary staff will be recruited away from 15 Berkshire County long-term care facilities 16 to work at this newly established acute-care 17 center. We learned together with the 18 Department as well as Health and Human 19 Services during the COVID-19 pandemic that 20 the single biggest barrier to building 21 additional acute and post-acute capacity is 22 hiring the workforce necessary to staff 23 these facilities. 24 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 above the pay rates at nursing facilities 4 and potentially all other employers in the 5 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 operations. 10 11 This alarming inequity is due to two key reasons. One, both Medicare and 12 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

1	that DPH use its authority to appropriately
2	impose conditions to the approval of the DoN
3	that seeks to preserve vital long-term care
4	services in Berkshire County while also
5	supporting this new project. Thank you.
6	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,
7	could we please have the next speaker.
8	THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is
9	James Birge. Your line is open.
10	MR. BIRGE: Good evening, and thank
11	you. My name is James Birge, and I'm a
12	resident of North Adams. I also serve as
13	president of Massachusetts College of
14	Liberal Arts, a nationally recognized public
15	four-year college located in North Adams.
16	I'm here to share more about our
17	transformative partnership with Berkshire
18	Health Systems and express our full approval
19	for the proposed return of inpatient care
20	and the opening of a new North Adams
21	Regional Hospital.
22	As the nation experiences a healthcare
23	staffing shortage on a wide scale, MCLA has
24	intentionally worked to implement a

1 comprehensive health sciences program with 2 the capacity and the advanced technology 3 necessary to train the next generation of health care workers in Berkshire County. 4 We have been fortunate to be able to 5 6 partner with Berkshire Health Systems in 7 this endeavor to help strengthen the college 8 career pipeline for healthcare professionals 9 in Berkshire County. We are grateful for 10 the health system support in everything from 11 providing financial support, teaching space, clinical instructors, staff, student lab 12 13 space, clinical equipment, and even PPE. 14 We are incredibly proud of our new 15 Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program, the 16 first of its kind in the region which 17 launched earlier this fall with support from 18 Berkshire Health Systems. Rooted in the 19 liberal arts tradition, we are training 20 students to be not only adept clinicians, 21 but compassionate caregivers and informed 22 community members. 23 This integrated approach is made 24 possible by the real-world training

1	opportunities provided by a Berkshire Health
2	Systems facility offering our students a
3	direct bridge from classroom learning to
4	practical application.
5	The reopening of North Adams Regional
6	Hospital aligns perfectly with our mission.
7	The facility would not only serve as an
8	essential health care hub for the community
9	but also as a learning ground for our
10	students. This hospital offers them real-
11	life experiences, natural pathways for
12	clinical training, and a promising avenue
13	for future employment right in their
14	backyard.
15	Furthermore, the presence of a top-
16	tier hospital in our community is a
17	significant draw for prospective college
18	students. For families considering MCLA,
19	knowing that quality care is readily
20	accessible brings invaluable peace of mind.
21	The hospital's reopening will bolster our
22	recruitment efforts, assuring families that
23	their loved ones have immediate access to
24	comprehensive health care during their

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college journey.

2 In summary, MCLA wholeheartedly 3 supports the project to reopen North Adams Regional Hospital. In a partnership with 4 Berkshire Health Systems, we are not just 5 6 reshaping the healthcare leaders of 7 tomorrow, we're ensuring the well-being of 8 our students in the larger Northern 9 Berkshires community for years to come. 10 Thank you for your time this evening. 11 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Just as a 12 reminder, the comments are allotted for 13 three minutes. And when you hear the chime, 14 it means that you do have 30 seconds left 15 for your comments. Operator, could we 16 please have the next speaker. 17 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is John 18 Lipa. Your line is open. 19 MR. LIPA: Hi, my name is John Lipa. 20 One month from today 78 years ago, I was 21 born at the North Adams Regional Hospital, 22 "the Reg." I was raised, grew up and have 23 been active in North Adams. I was chair of 24 the following organizations: The North

1 Adams Redevelopment Authority, Northern 2 Berkshire Industrial Park Commission, 3 Northern Berkshire United Way, Berkshire Regional Employment Board and the 4 Massachusetts Workforce Board. I worked for 5 6 31 years for General Dynamics in Pittsfield 7 and retired as the head person of human 8 resources. 9 Thank you for this opportunity to share 10 my thoughts and supportive of Berkshire 11 Health Systems Determination in Need and intent to reopen the North Adams Regional 12 13 Hospital known to locals as "The Reg" to a 14 critical access hospital designation. 15 It would be wonderful knowing that 16 there is hospital not only in my community, 17 North Adams, but also in my neighborhood. It would mean I would not have to take a 18 19 long bumpy ride on a two-lane road to a 20 hospital in either Bennington, Vermont, or 21 Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in an ambulance. 22 It would only be a two-minute ride from my 23 house in North Adams. 24 The reopening would be a huge

1 psychological boost to the community knowing 2 a semblance of The Reg is back in operation providing quality health care locally. It 3 would mean the younger generations would be 4 able to say as I do, my wife, three sisters-5 in-law, a mother-in-law, many cousins and 6 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 medical and behavioral health treatment. It 14 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

Liberal Arts, and our outstanding vocational technical school, McCann's, would be able to train students for real jobs in the healthcare field locally. It would mean more disposable income for residents to support local businesses, buy homes and renovate.

8 It would mean more young people would 9 have not have to relocate to find a good 10 job. It would mean more young families 11 wanting to have children here and raise them 12 in our community. In short, only good 13 things will happen when the North Adams 14 Regional Hospital, The Reg, is reopened as a 15 critical access hospital under the guidance 16 of Berkshire Health Systems.

17Thank you for listening, and please18make a decision to make the rebirth of the19North Adams Regional Hospital a reality.20Thank you.

MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,
could we please have the next speaker.
THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is
Richard Alcombright. Your line is open.

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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 wholeheartedly say that this project is a 2 3 tremendous step in advancing the organization's strategic efforts to improve 4 health care access as part of our mission to 5 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 addiction of a friend or a loved one. 21 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

1 and resources. And I'm optimistic that the 2 revival of our hospital with a focus on 3 reducing health disparities and supporting the most vulnerable in our community will be 4 instrumental in bolstering our fight against 5 6 substance use disorders. 7 Thank you all so much for your time and 8 your consideration. 9 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 10 we have the next speaker, please. 11 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Lou 12 Ann Quinn. Your line is open. 13 MS. QUINN: Good evening. My name is 14 Lou Ann Quinn, and my town of residence is 15 North Adams, Massachusetts. I was the 16 former site director of the North Campus as 17 well as the clinical manager of the 18 satellite emergency facility since 2014 19 after the closure of North Adams Regional 20 Hospital. Prior to this, I was a nursing director for NARH from 1976 to 2014. 21 22 The 2014 closure of NARH was 23 heartbreaking for me, and the recent 24 opportunity to apply for a CAH designation

1	and reopen inpatient services provides an
2	amazing opportunity for us to promote better
3	health outcomes for patients in our
4	community. Though I just recently retired
5	on September 30, I will do everything in my
6	power to support and promote the center.
7	Inpatient care in our community means
8	that patients can get essential care close
9	to home. Patients with pneumonia, heart
10	failure, COPD and chest pain, among other
11	diagnoses could receive care right here in
12	North Adams rather than being stabilized in
13	our satellite emergency department and then
14	transported for inpatient care to another
15	facility.
16	With family, friends and community
17	resources close by, patients are more likely
18	to experience positive outcomes. Providing
19	care close to home helps reduce the impacts
20	of social challenges, like lack of available
21	transportation to go home after discharge.
22	Further, limited ambulance transport
00	resources will now be reserved for patients
23	
23	

1 tertiary facility for a higher level of care 2 that can be provided at our CAH. This will 3 decrease delays in transfer and promote better access to critical care. 4 5 Additionally, the comfort and 6 convenience of a local inpatient facility 7 makes it easier for patients to seek care 8 when they need it instead of waiting until 9 their symptoms are worse. I've personally 10 observed that patients in North County tend to avoid or defer care due to lack of 11 12 transportation and financial resources or 13 available social support. 14 By offering hospital-level care close 15 to home, BHS will be able to deepen its 16 relationship with patients so that the North 17 County patient population will be less 18 likely to defer timely important care and 19 therefore will be more likely to experience 20 positive health outcomes. 21 I'd like to share a quick story about a 22 patient who delayed care and presented to 23 the staff after days of increasing chest 24 pain. The patient was markedly hypertensive

1 and short of breath on arrival. 2 Fortunately, the patient anginal symptoms 3 were rapidly managed and an impending myocardial infarction or MI warded off, but 4 5 they needed further observation and 6 explained that the major reason for not 7 coming to the hospital was that a family 8 member needed care at home, and the patient 9 would be unable to do this from Pittsfield. 10 By having beds here at North Adams, the 11 patient acknowledged they would have been 12 more willing to come at the onset of their 13 pain and would have found it easier to 14 navigate the additional required days of 15 observation. 16 By improving access to care this 17 project can support our most vulnerable 18 residents. It helps create a -- (timer 19 played) culture for North Adams and the 20 whole northern Berkshire region. I strongly 21 support this project, and thank you for your 22 consideration. 23 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. As a reminder, 24 if you would like to testify, please press

Page 42 1 Star 1. Operator, may we have the next 2 speaker, please? 3 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Jackie Felix. Your line is open. 4 MS. FELIX: Good evening. My name is 5 6 Jackie Felix. Thank you for allowing me the 7 opportunity to share with you my testimony 8 at this public hearing. I reside in North 9 Adams, and my husband, Bob, is a resident of 10 Williamstown Common Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. 11 12 Bob and I have been married for 25 13 years. We're both in our 70s and have lived 14 in the Williamstown, North Adams, area for 15 most of our lives. As we aged, it became 16 clear that Bob was struggling with a number 17 of health-related issues. He was a vibrant 18 and engaged man who enjoyed outdoor 19 activities as well as time with friends and 20 family. When his Alzheimer's disease 21 22 progressed, I became increasingly concerned 23 about his safety and how I would be able to 24 care for him. He would run away or elope

1 from our home, and keeping him safe began to 2 be my biggest priority. I tried for a long 3 time to keep him at home with me, but eventually it became more than I could 4 handle. 5 6 I also told myself I would never put 7 Bob in the nursing home. I think many 8 people tell themselves that. In fairness, 9 it isn't where people aspire to be. As 10 humans, we convince ourselves that we're 11 invincible. We don't want to accept our 12 aging or infirmity or reliance on others. 13 We convince ourselves that we can take care 14 of it all and make it all work. I'm here to 15 say that this way of thinking can be flawed. 16 We don't do ourselves any favors when we 17 deny that we may need help along the way, 18 and we may need help for an extended period 19 of time like months, years, instead of a few 20 days. 21 Much as I would love to care for my 22 husband in our own home, it was not 23 possible. His care needs were too great, 24 and his safety was a constant risk. When he

1	suffered in late 2021 on top of Parkinson's
2	and Alzheimer's, it became evident that Bob
3	needed more care and a team of caregivers.
4	At the time, he had just gotten discharged
5	from the hospital to be sent to a nursing
6	home in Pittsfield 26 miles away from where
7	we live and 50-minute drive one way.
8	I visited him each day. The drive was
9	not only very time consuming, but I returned
10	every evening exhausted. I could not
11	continue with that, that's when with a lot
12	of help, I worked to get Bob moved to
13	Williamstown Commons Nursing and
14	Rehabilitation. This nursing home is five
15	minutes from home, ten minutes away for me.
16	I can get to him easily, and I'm able to see
17	him whenever I like or need to.
18	I can't say enough about this local
19	health care resource. I've been so happy
20	with our experience at Williamstown Common.
21	The staff there treats the residents and
22	family like their own family.
23	The residents of Northern Berkshire
24	County, including myself, are happy to know

that North Adams Regional Hospital will be returning services to our region. That's truly good news.

What I wonder about is if the community understands the impact the reinvigoration of the hospital will have to other health care services in this region. This includes nursing homes. The ability of the hospital to swing medical surgical beds to nursing home beds has the potential to destabilize nursing homes in this area.

12 If these facilities cannot sustain 13 themselves to swing beds, it will create an access issue for residents of Northern 14 15 Berkshire County. It will require them to 16 travel almost an hour away to see their 17 loved ones. I worry that most people won't 18 realize the importance of nursing home 19 access until it's too late and the services 20 are significantly reduced or not present at all in our community. 21

22 We need these centers to survive and 23 thrive. The thought of not being able to 24 see my husband is devastating, but I know

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1 that I don't want to go back to what I went 2 through in 2021. I ask you to reconsider measures designed to help stabilize all 3 parts of healthcare services in Northern 4 5 Berkshire county, including nursing homes. 6 Please do not put these important vital 7 centers at risk. 8 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 9 we have the next speaker, please. 10 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is 11 Patrick Borek. Your line is open. 12 MR. RENAUD: Good evening. I'm Pat 13 Borek. I'm a resident of Dalton, Massachusetts. As the Vice President for 14 15 Human Resources for Berkshire Health 16 Systems, I'm well aware of the challenges 17 and opportunities inherent in maintaining 18 our healthcare workforce in our region. 19 The decision to reopen the North Adams 20 Hospital as a critical access hospital 21 offers our community an exciting opportunity 22 for economic growth and career advancement. 23 We have estimated that the North Adams 24 critical access hospital project will create

1 between 60 and 70 new positions on the North 2 This is a significant boost Adams campus. 3 to our local employment landscape and represents a growth of about 37 percent on 4 5 the North Adams campus. These positions span a range of roles, 6 7 many of which are included in SEIU and MNA 8 bargaining units. I'm pleased to share that 9 we are in full agreement with both unions, 10 that the existing bargaining units and 11 associated labor agreements will remain in 12 place. 13 Therefore, we'll continue to honor the 14 existing labor agreements at this campus 15 with respect to new staff and new positions 16 in these bargaining units. We have been 17 meeting with both unions to discuss changes, 18 provide information and gain input and 19 suggestions on the transition as we move 20 forward. 21 One of the great benefits of this 22 project is the opportunity it presents for 23 our employees. We expect that a number of 24 current employees who live in North

1	Berkshire and previously worked for the
2	North Adams Regional Hospital will apply for
3	internal transfers in order to work closer
4	to home. This type of transfer will help
5	ensure that BHS high standards will be
6	reflected throughout our system. Working
7	closer to home not only reduces commute
8	times, but enhances work-life balance.
9	We've also seen former employees drawn
10	by the prospect of serving their community
11	consider coming out of retirement or
12	postponing their retirement plans. This not
13	only augments our workforce, but also brings
14	a wealth of experience back into our fold.
15	Furthermore, our commitment to the
16	community goes beyond immediate health care
17	needs . We're incredibly proud of our
18	portfolio of career pathway programs that
19	are designed to reduce barriers to
20	employment by helping to recruit and train
21	the region's skilled healthcare workforce
22	from within our very own community.
23	Conducted in partnership with local
24	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 pipeline of skilled healthcare workers, but 12 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
13 14	The absence of a dedicated health care facility in North Adams and the Northern
14	facility in North Adams and the Northern
14 15	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions.
14 15 16	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of
14 15 16 17	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of surgical care. Without a local facility,
14 15 16 17 18	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of surgical care. Without a local facility, our community members have often found
14 15 16 17 18 19	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of surgical care. Without a local facility, our community members have often found themselves going undiagnosed or untreated
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of surgical care. Without a local facility, our community members have often found themselves going undiagnosed or untreated for long periods of time because they don't
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	facility in North Adams and the Northern Berkshires has had tangible repercussions. One of the most evident is in the realm of surgical care. Without a local facility, our community members have often found themselves going undiagnosed or untreated for long periods of time because they don't want to travel for care or putting off

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 experienced patients from rural communities 4 5 like ours arriving septic, clinically unstable, or without -- or with acute bleeds 6 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 doorstep. 12 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

also ensures that patients have necessary post-surgical care immediately available.

19The efficiency that this project20promises is significant. Having the21capability to provide inpatient and22outpatient surgical care in North Adams for23surrounding communities, streamlines both24the patient's journey and the clinical

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1 provider's experience. It reduces wait 2 times, ensures continuity of care, and 3 fundamentally transforms the health care experience for both community members and 4 the healthcare professionals who serve them. 5 6 Furthermore, it has the potential to 7 help recruit and retain surgeons to our 8 area. As a surgeon myself, I can attest 9 that we always prefer to operate in the same 10 location where our patients can receive 11 inpatient surgical care, which allows for 12 optimal care coordination. This project is 13 a step towards a more proactive, efficient, 14 and patient centric health care model for 15 North Adams and Northern Berkshires as a 16 whole. 17 I stand firmly behind this vision and 18 urge you to consider its profound impact on 19 our community's health. Thank you for your 20 time and attention. 21 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 22 we have the next speaker, please. 23 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is 24 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

1	stability, and transportation. This
2	proactive step can guide our community
3	members to the resources they need, thereby
4	enhancing the overall well-being.
5	We have also committed to collecting
6	and analyzing patient data at the new North
7	Adams Regional Hospital. By doing so, we
8	will be better equipped to recognize
9	patterns, understand the unique health
10	challenges of our community and tailor our
11	interventions accordingly. This data will
12	serve as the foundation for our targeted
13	health equity initiatives.
14	Lastly, the hospital will be a catalyst
15	for extending our reach into the community.
16	By fostering partnerships and rolling out
17	education and outreach programs, we aim to
18	address the most pressing health challenges,
19	especially in areas like chronic disease and
20	substance use disorder.
21	The North Adams project is a testament
22	to our dedication to expanding access to
23	care, especially in regions like North Adams
24	that face heightened challenges. It is a

1	chance to address barriers, enhance access,
2	and take another step on our long journey
3	towards health equity. Thank you.
4	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. If you are
5	having difficulty getting into the queue,
6	you can try hanging up and calling back in
7	and that might allow you to enter the queue.
8	And as a reminder, if you would like to
9	testify, please press Star 1.
10	Operator, can we have the next speaker
11	please. Thank you.
12	THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is
13	Amber Besaw. Your line is open.
14	MS. BESAW: Hello, everyone. I'm Amber
15	Besaw, the Executive Director of the
16	Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and
17	resident of North Adams.
18	At NBCC health and wellness is one of
19	our central areas of focus in our work to
20	achieve our mission of empowering the
21	members of our Northern Berkshire region to
22	enhance the quality of their lives. We are
23	encouraged by the possibility of an
24	inpatient care once again being available in

1 a new North Adams Regional Hospital, a place 2 that would be welcoming and accessible to 3 all members of our community. This project would be a significant 4 5 step by Berkshire Health Systems towards 6 bridging health care gaps and providing 7 essential support for families and 8 individuals in our community across the life 9 span who struggle with generational poverty, systemic barriers to health care, 10 11 transportation issues, food insecurity, 12 homelessness, substance use disorder, and 13 domestic violence. 14 Additionally, for members of our 15 community who are living into the later 16 years of their lives, access to health care 17 in their home community can mean so much for 18 them and their families, extending the 19 continuum of care that they can find close 20 to home. For these families and individuals 21 having access to local quality health care 22 can be often life changing.

23Berkshire Health Systems' commitment to24community partnership aligns with our

1	mission, and we look forward to working even
2	more closely together to create a cohesive
3	supportive environment for our community
4	members.
5	On behalf of the Northern Berkshire
6	Community Coalition, we look forward to
7	collaborating with Berkshire Health Systems
8	and other community partners to support the
9	project to open the new North Adams Regional
10	Hospital and strive to make our shared
11	vision of a thriving Northern Berkshire
12	region become a reality. Thank you for your
13	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	Scott St. George. Your line is open.
18	MR. ST. GEORGE: Yes, hi, good evening.
19	This is Scott St. George. I'm a resident of
20	Richmond, Massachusetts, and I serve as
21	Chief Financial Officer at Berkshire Health
22	Systems.
23	As we move forward with a proposal to
24	reestablish North Adams Regional Hospital, I

1	want to highlight the dedication BHS has
2	shown in ensuring both the viability and
3	sustainability of health care in our region.
4	This initiative is a testament to our
5	commitment to stewardship, ensuring we
6	utilize resources wisely and effectively for
7	the betterment of our community.
8	For the past 10 years since the
9	bankruptcy and closure of the former North
10	Adams Hospital, we have consistently worked
11	in a proactive, creative manner to ensure
12	that the residents of North County have
13	access to high quality care right at their
14	doorstep.
15	We have done this through the North
16	County Campus of BMC where we have provided
17	24/7 emergency care and other outpatient
18	services since shortly after North Adams
19	closed. And now recent changes in the
20	critical access hospital designation have
21	opened a door for us making inpatient beds
22	in North Adams a new reality.
23	The opportunity to implement the
24	critical access hospital designation would

1 enable us to be self-sufficient and provide 2 the full continuum of care. Based on the 3 community demographics and our understanding of the current patient panel in Northern 4 5 Berkshire, we estimate that a significant 6 portion of the patients we expect to serve 7 in North Adams would be beneficiaries of Medicare and Medicaid. 8 9 Our commitment to these especially 10 vulnerable populations is unwavering. By 11 bringing inpatient care closer to them, we 12 aim to improve health outcomes, reduce re-13 admissions and prevent adverse health 14 events. This approach not only enhances the 15 quality of care our patients receive but 16 also offers higher value care in the long 17 run. 18 In conclusion, at BHS, our focus has 19 always been on balancing the immediate needs 20 of our community with the long-term 21 sustainability of health care in the region. 22 This project exemplifies our commitment to 23 that goal, and I'm confident that with the

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24

support of this community and the hard work

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1	of our BHS team, we will continue to elevate
2	the standard of care in North Adams and the
3	broader Northern Berkshire area. Thank you
4	very much.
5	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may
6	we have the next speaker, please.
7	THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is
8	Diane Spina. Your line is open.
9	MS. SPINA: Hi, yes, hello. My name is
10	Diane Spina. I'm the union delegate of the
11	former North Adams Hospital, and I'm also a
12	phlebotomist there in the lab.
13	Opening this hospital is very vital to
14	prevent suffering and provide faster
15	treatment with physicians on hand with the
16	experience needed that you cannot get at
17	other agencies. I had to experience this
18	nightmare firsthand with my own mother in
19	respiratory failure.
20	Please take a moment to reflect and
21	remember this closing of the hospital was
22	not the community's choice. There are
23	numerous reasons people refuse to go to
24	another hospital a distance away from home

1	even if those reasons don't seem clear to
2	those of us who do not agree. Please
3	consider the following in the case of a
4	patient having to travel to another hospital
5	not close by, each mile traveled is a mile
6	of suffering chest pain, abdominal pain,
7	respiratory issues from serious injuries.
8	Imagine the horror of this pain.
9	The amount of drug addiction in
10	Berkshire County is overwhelming, and a
11	close-by hospital could save lives.
12	Suicidal patients, mentally depressed,
13	special needs will benefit from overnight
14	observation and receive immediate attention
15	without the delay of communications to
16	another hospital.
17	Many patients will and do refuse
18	treatment further away from their home
19	because they have a pet they cherish and
20	will not leave that pet because they have no
21	one to turn to or trust to care for their
22	pet companion. Likewise, they don't have
23	anyone to care for perhaps a special needs
24	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 -to get to them if there's a problem at the 4 hospital and not if they need -- to get to 5 the hospital right away, family members 6 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. This is a serious issue. An ambulance ride 11 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

1 will better serve the large population of 2 elderly that we have in the community. 3 Elderly living in the area nursing homes and elderly housing will receive treatment 4 without all the delays of going to another 5 6 facility further away, including delays with 7 documentation, communication from one person 8 to many others. Thank you. 9 MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 10 we have the next speaker, please. THE OPERATOR: Yes, the next speaker is 11 Marie Harpin. Your line is open. 12 13 MS. HARPIN: Hello, everyone. My name 14 is Marie Harpin. I'm a resident of North 15 Adams and also a North Adams city councilor. 16 I would like to share some of my personal 17 experiences with accessing health care in 18 our area and emphasize how valuable it is to have health care close to home. 19 20 My mom, Mimi Harpin, is 85 years old. 21 She is a native of North Adams and very 22 involved in the community as a leader 23 throughout her life. Over the years, she 24 has had various health issues, and my

1	siblings and I have taken on the role of
2	caregivers. North Adams Regional Hospital
3	was the only hospital where my mom had ever
4	received care. And when it closed in 2014,
5	it felt like it was detrimental to her well-
6	being.
7	Over the past 10 years, she has
8	experienced several emergencies that have
9	required trips to the emergency room and
10	hospital stays. And it is honestly been
11	very difficult to get her to agree to go for
12	care since North Adams Regional Hospital
13	closed.
14	At first she protested and said she was
14	-
14	simply not going. She eventually agreed to
15	simply not going. She eventually agreed to
15 16	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew
15 16 17	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time
15 16 17 18	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time to adjust. This past August, mom went to
15 16 17 18 19	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time to adjust. This past August, mom went to the emergency department on the North Adams
15 16 17 18 19 20	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time to adjust. This past August, mom went to the emergency department on the North Adams campus. She received great care there, but
15 16 17 18 19 20 21	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time to adjust. This past August, mom went to the emergency department on the North Adams campus. She received great care there, but ended up needing to be admitted for a few
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	simply not going. She eventually agreed to getting the care she needed because she knew she had to, but it definitely took her time to adjust. This past August, mom went to the emergency department on the North Adams campus. She received great care there, but ended up needing to be admitted for a few days, so she was transferred to Berkshire

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

1	Berkshire is an aging community, and I
2	strongly believe that our experience is not
3	unique. There are a lot of people out there
4	like me, and there are a lot of people like
5	my mom, and for some, traveling to
6	Pittsfield is not an accessible option due
7	to transportation, winter weather or other
8	challenges.
9	Bringing inpatient beds back to North
10	Adams means that more families like mine can
11	be present both physically and emotionally
12	during some of life's most challenging
13	moments. Thank you for considering the deep
14	impact this project will have on families
15	throughout our community.
16	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator,
17	maybe we have the next speaker, please.
18	THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Bill
19	Jones. Your line is open.
20	MR. JONES: Good evening, Director
21	Renaud. My name is Bill Jones, and I'm the
22	President and CEO of Integritus Healthcare.
23	We are the largest not-for-profit provider
24	of senior living nursing home and hospice

1 services in the Commonwealth, and we're 2 based here in Berkshire County. Our mission 3 statement speaks to the commitment purposeful work we do each day, and I've had 4 5 the privilege of being part of this 6 organization for 35 years. 7 We, too, support the reopening of the 8 hospital. Yet, we also know that health 9 care policy often comes with nuances that 10 are invariably complex. That is certainly the case here. We have concerns for the 11 12 unintended consequences the CAH designation 13 will have on nursing homes. 14 To recap, the complexities that reveal 15 themselves in the DoN filing and in critical 16 access policy pertain to the use of nursing home swing beds, reimbursement for those 17 18 swing beds at cost plus a profit, and that 19 other nursing homes in Northern Berkshire 20 are not entitled to this reimbursement 21 benefit. In fact, in contrast, nursing 22 homes are not reimbursed fully by Medicaid. 23 In 2022, the shortfall was \$4.7 million 24 in Northern Berkshire alone. Think about

1	that for a minute. One nursing home will be
2	reimbursed at cost plus a profit while the
3	other two in the same market will be
4	reimbursed less than their costs. This
5	disparity must be addressed and corrected.
6	Absent that, the combination of this
7	enhanced reimbursement coupled with the
8	ability to swing bed use as a nursing home
9	presents a real threat to the viability of
10	nursing homes in Northern Berkshire.
11	Williamstown and North Adams Commons
12	are high-quality providers serving their
13	communities for over 59 years. They are
14	home to 225 frail, medically complex
15	residents from our community. They don't
16	want to travel outside of Northern Berkshire
17	for their nursing home care. Access to this
18	part of the continuum is critical for this
19	rural part of Massachusetts.
20	As noted, Medicaid under funds costs
21	for long-term care in nursing homes.
22	Medicare revenues fund that shortfall. We
23	believe that the swing-bed policy will shift
24	

undermine the safety net provided for longterm care residents. In conjunction with the swing-bed reimbursement disadvantage, I'm concerned about our ability to maintain access to nursing homes in Northern Berkshire. An associated concern is the shortage of nursing and ancillary staff. Current vacancy rates suggests the need to recruit up to 250 nurses and aides in our Berkshire County nursing homes. While we're making considerable investments in the pipeline for aides and licensed staff, these efforts will take time and money to bear fruit.

15 We are concerned about our ability to 16 recruit and retain staff in an environment 17 that includes critical access designation 18 only to the new acute-care hospital. This 19 labor attrition coupled with the revenue 20 deficit will likely undermine our ability to 21 deliver high-quality nursing care that the 22 community has relied on for so many years. 23 Thank you for your time this evening 24 and for the opportunity to testify. It is

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1	our hope that this process will lead to
2	further discussion and solutions that ensure
3	the broader continuum is not destabilized as
4	a result of critical access policies. Thank
5	you.
6	MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may
7	we have our next speaker, please.
8	THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is Ryan
9	Cuthbertson. Your line is open.
10	MR. CUTHBERTSON: Good evening. I'm
11	Ryan Cuthbertson of Hooper, Lundy and
12	Bookman speaking on behalf of the
13	Massachusetts Senior Care Association.
14	We've now heard from some long-term
15	care operational experts and families
16	voicing great concern over the impact that
17	the proposed project will have on the
18	regional long-term care system. We have not
19	heard, and I doubt that we will hear, anyone
20	opposing the project in its entirety or
21	diminishing its necessity. What we have
22	heard is that the project parameters as
23	described in the DoN application will
24	jeopardize access to critical long-term care

services for the region's residents and family members.

3 In the applicant's community engagement presentation, it says that healthcare is a 4 balancing act, balancing the needs of the 5 6 community against financial sustainability. 7 The applicant stressed to the community that it is, quote/unquote, "always working to 8 9 maintain this balance so that we can advance health and wellness for our whole 10 11 community." Had the applicant's community engagement efforts included other key 12 13 stakeholders such as local long-term care 14 providers, we would have received valuable 15 insight into the role of those providers in 16 maintaining that community-wide balance.

17 It is clear that Berkshire County 18 contains an ever increasingly sick and aging 19 population whose needs extend beyond just 20 acute care. Long-term care is another 21 critical and irreplaceable function on the 22 healthcare continuum for these residents. 23 Though it is clear that maximizing the 24 number of lucrative swing beds addresses the

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1 applicant's financial sustainability, it 2 would come at a cost of sacrificing the 3 needs of the community by hampering access to critical long-term care services. 4 The Massachusetts Senior Care 5 Association on behalf of its members is 6 7 therefore respectfully requesting that this 8 project be approved only with certain 9 important conditions aimed to sustain the 10 balance of the healthcare ecosystem in 11 Berkshire County. These conditions are 12 intended to address both of the major issues 13 that would exacerbate the long-term care 14 access problem, financial impact and 15 staffing. 16 To address the financial harm to the 17 local long-term care facilities, we request that the number of beds authorized for 18 19 swing-bed designation be capped at two beds. 20 This would mitigate harm to the local post-21 acute and long-term care infrastructure 22 while still allowing the ability to provide 23 adequate post-acute care at the hospital 24 location.
1 To address the seemingly inevitable 2 impact to the already strained staffing 3 resources at area SNFs, we request that the applicant agree not to actively solicit 4 clinical or ancillary staff in skilled 5 6 nursing facilities located within a 25-mile 7 radius of the hospital effective from the date of DoN approval and continuing for two 8 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 devastatingly abrupt staff exodus that would 14 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 can agree on the merits of the underlying 4 5 need of the project. We are just asking you consider in your 6 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. MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, may 17 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

1	of Northern Berkshire EMS, the sole provider
2	of emergency medical services for 10
3	municipalities in the Northern Berkshire,
4	Southern Vermont region.
5	As someone who's dedicated his life to
6	ensuring the timely and effective delivery
7	of emergency care, I can't overstate the
8	significance of having care resources close
9	to home, both for our emergency medical
10	service providers, and for our community as
11	a whole.
12	In my role, I see firsthand our EMS
13	teams working tirelessly to respond to
14	emergencies. Our goal is always to provide
15	the best care as quickly as possible. With
16	a critical access hospital right here in
17	North Adams, we can drastically reduce
18	transport time ensuring that patients
19	receive care faster and more efficiently.
20	This not only improves outcomes, but also
21	allows our EMS teams to be ready for the
22	next call sooner, bolstering our community's
23	overall safety and system status management
24	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

Page 77 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 transporting patients back and forth, they 4 would receive continuous care in a single 5 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 benefit it will bring to our EMS services in 11 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. THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is 16 Elizabeth Daley. Your line is open. 17 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

1 resources needed to carry through our 2 mission are available. It is not about 3 making a profit. It's about sustainability 4 and providing high quality of care to those 5 we serve. 6 We provide a service to this community 7 that many desire. In this there are both 8 physical and spiritual -- both physical and 9 spiritual needs. Our concern with this 10 current DoN is they include the labor 11 necessary to provide the quality of care 12 that our residents deserve, the ability to 13 achieve a (inaudible) that has been 14 mentioned before Medicare, Medicaid, private 15 insurance, to fund fair wages, and to 16 attract quality staff, and fund the many expenses associated with maintaining a long-17 18 term care facility and offering choices to 19 our residents who need post-acute care. 20 Since the onset of the COVID-19 21 pandemic, staffing has become a challenge, 22 not just in Berkshire County but also across 23 the Commonwealth. While the challenge

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exists across the state, our labor pool and

1 our resident population in Berkshire County 2 is limited in comparison to Central and 3 Eastern Massachusetts. Given the reimbursement rates of 4 5 skilled nursing facilities in comparison to 6 hospitals and other health care 7 environments, it is extremely difficult to 8 provide a wage that both attracts and 9 retains quality caregivers in the long term, 10 so limiting swing beds we believe would help 11 even the playing field. 12 We also are concerned about resident 13 choice, and much of our census comes from 14 word of mouth community experience and 15 spiritual -- and spiritual needs, and 16 providing patients with the same beds at the 17 hospital so that they can receive similar 18 care at nursing facilities is a challenge 19 for us nursing facilities. 20 The thought of a hospital provides a 21 higher level of acuity of care. In reality, 22 we are all providing subacute care, so we 23 ask that you have consideration for the 24 number of swing beds available as we are

Page 82 1 already working under budget and under 2 census stability. 3 So I thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight and hope you consider some of 4 those efforts to make it an even playing 5 field while serving the entirety of the 6 7 community. Thank you. 8 MR. RENAUD: Operator, we have the next 9 speaker, please. 10 THE OPERATOR: The next speaker is 11 Michelle Byron. Your line is open. 12 MS. BYRON: Thank you. Good evening. 13 My name is Michelle Byron. I was born and 14 raised in North Berkshire County, and I am 15 currently a resident of Adams. 16 Both of my children were born at the 17 Old North Adams Regional Hospital, but the 18 most amount of time I've spent in our local 19 health care facilities has been in caring 20 for my elderly parents. 21 After the hospital closed, the biggest 22 problem was that we had to go to BMC in 23 Pittsfield for inpatient care. It would 24 have been so much more convenient to have a

hospital right nearby, and what was more important, it was comforting to my parents to be in a hospital they were familiar with. Needing to go to the hospital is hard enough, but when they faced the knowledge

that a hospital stay meant a trip to
Pittsfield, it was even more overwhelming.
Whether it was a urinary tract infection or
a respiratory virus, traveling to BMC put a
lot of extra stress on both them and us.

11 My parents are now in a nursing home, 12 but I myself am almost 72, and personally I 13 would like to know that if I need hospital 14 care, I could be taken care of in North 15 Adams so that it would be easier on my 16 family. I strongly support BHS's proposal 17 to bring inpatient beds back to North Adams.

18 Thank you for recognizing the value
19 that reestablishing this care will have on
20 our rural community. Thank you.

21MR. RENAUD: Thank you. Operator, can22I confirm that there are no other speakers23in the queue?

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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

	Page 85
1	hearing is now closed. Thank you.
2	THE OPERATOR: This concludes today's
3	conference. All participants may disconnect
4	at this time.
5	(Whereupon, public hearing was
6	concluded at 7:33 p.m.)
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1	CERTIFICATE
2	COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
3	NORFOLK, SS.
4	
5	I, Amy Marascio, a Professional Court Reporter
6	and Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of
7	Massachusetts, do hereby certify that the foregoing
8	telephonic public hearing was taken before me on
9	October 25, 2023.
10	The said telephonic public hearing was taken
11	audiographically by myself and then transcribed under
12	my direction. To the best of my knowledge, the within
13	transcript is a complete, true and accurate record of
14	said telephonic public hearing.
15	I am not connected by blood or marriage with any
16	of the said parties, nor interested directly or
17	indirectly in the matter in controversy.
18	In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand
19	this 30th day of October 2023.
20	
21	amy marascio
22	\bigcirc
22	Amy Marascio, Notary Public
23	My Commission Expires:
24	May 31, 2030

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