



August 4, 2020

Kevin Mullin, Chair  
Green Mountain Care Board  
via email to [kevin.mullin@vermont.gov](mailto:kevin.mullin@vermont.gov)

Dear Chair Mullin:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments at the July 15 Green Mountain Care Board meeting on sustainability planning. We agree on the need for a strong and resilient health care system, and hope to work with you and your team to develop a planning process that meets shared goals.

It is critical to acknowledge that hospitals are still managing operational and clinical challenges related to COVID-19. This work requires support at all levels of leadership and staff. Despite Vermont's laudable progress containing the virus, it appears increasingly likely our state will experience another wave this fall or winter, which could once again trigger the steps we had to take earlier this year including but not limited to suspension of non-urgent medical procedures.

Meanwhile, challenges continue to surface daily in numerous areas: testing supplies, PPE acquisition, infection prevention, data reporting, travel restrictions and, of course, financial recovery—to name a few. Since February, pandemic response efforts have been ongoing and grueling. As a result, hospitals have fewer employees available for GMCB work and difficult financial analyses. Clinical and administrative staff are stretched now more than ever.

Even as these factors play out, hospitals remain committed to value-based care, controlling costs, improving quality and ensuring access. Providers including hospitals are doing this work without the support of promised delivery system reform investments and with Medicare/Medicaid payments that fall far short of medical inflation.

Given this backdrop, VAHHS' Board of Trustees—which represents the leadership of Vermont's entire hospital community—has expressed both concern and confusion about the sustainability planning process.

If sustainability means ensuring each hospital can keep serving its patients and communities, then it is achieved as part of the GMCB's already exhaustive annual budget review. If sustainability means planning and managing the next iterations of health reform and system transformation, that is an important but different conversation.



As you know, reform work is already taking place across our state through OneCare and the All Payer Model. Therefore, any conversation contemplating reform must include stakeholders from other parts of the health care delivery system on a timeline that makes sense for all.

Given hospitals' unanimous view of the heavy lift and difficult timing your sustainability structure involves, our recommendation is to:

- Assess each organization's sustainability within the hospital budget process, which collects ample data and is well designed to account for the factors informing hospital health.
- Rethink and postpone the broader conversation connecting sustainability with reform and transformation until after the annual hospital budget process is complete. This would offer space for a more thorough and public dialogue about what the process should look like and achieve.

Vermont's hospitals are eager to have that discussion with the GMCB, as well as with the other policymakers and providers crucial to its success. At the same time, we do not believe the path to our future health system is built by a long series of financial information requests issued to hospitals in the midst of a still-raging public health crisis.

As always, thank you for hearing our input and ideas. Let's now work together to create a process best suited to achieve the result we all desire: a strong, sustainable health care system that meets the needs of all Vermonters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Tieman".

Jeff Tieman  
President & CEO, Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven R. Gordon".

Steven Gordon  
President & CEO, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital  
Chair, VAHHS Board of Trustees



Claudio Fort  
President & CEO, Rutland Regional Medical Center



Dan Bennett  
President & CEO, Gifford Medical Center



Jerry Barbini  
Interim CEO, Northwestern Medical Center



Brian Nall  
CEO, North Country Hospital



John R. Brumsted, MD  
President & CEO, University of Vermont Health Network



Anna Noonan, RN, BSN, MS  
President & COO, Central Vermont Medical Center



Louis Josephson, Ph.D  
President & CEO, Brattleboro Retreat



Joseph Perras, MD  
President, CEO & CMO, Mt. Ascutney Hospital



Stephen Leffler, MD  
President & COO, University of Vermont Medical Center



Mike Halstead  
Interim CEO, Springfield Hospital



Tom Dee  
President & CEO, Southwestern Vermont Health Care



Tom Thompson  
Interim President & COO, Porter Medical Center



Doug DiVello  
President & CEO, Grace Cottage Hospital




Joseph Woodin  
President & CEO, Copley Hospital



Shawn Tester  
CEO, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital



Todd Gregory, MD  
Medical Director, Emergency Department, Rutland Regional Medical Center



Kathleen McGraw, MD  
Chief Medical Officer & CIO, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital



Michael Costa  
CEO, Northern Counties Health Care

