

August 21, 2023

Dear Green Mountain Care Board members,

I am writing to comment on the Hospital Budget Review process and express my dismay and astonishment that, yet again, most of the hospitals, especially UVMHN, are requesting double digit increases that might actually be approved!

How can this be? How can we continue to plow money into a hospital system that is so inefficient and so outmoded to the detriment of all the other necessary services? A quick calculation shows that the UVMHN two-year increase alone amounts to about \$356 million. I cannot help but think about what we could do with that money to make primary care and mental health care available and affordable for every Vermonter. Even half that amount would make a huge difference in the lives of Vermonters who are not getting care because they cannot afford their co-pays and deductibles.

Your own consultants have told you that upwards of 35% of in-patient revenue in Vermont is potentially “avoidable”. Why isn’t the Board focused on this issue? “Avoidable” care presumably means care that could have been prevented or provided in a more appropriate and low-cost ~~efficient~~ setting. Focusing on this issue is the right way to re-structure our hospital system to make it more efficient and transfer funding to support primary care, mental health and other community services.

It starts with holding the line on hospital spending. When I was in state government, I worked at different times as the Commissioner of DAIL, the Commissioner of Mental Health, and the Deputy Secretary of AHS. I vividly recall being directed every year to submit budgets to the administration with 2%, 5% and sometimes even higher reductions. We were expected to find efficiencies and be prepared to cut programs and staff. I don’t understand why a similar approach cannot be taken with the hospitals. We know we have a hospital system with many unnecessary and unaffordable components. Why aren’t we discussing re-structuring it to be efficient instead of propping it up with huge sums of money that are needed elsewhere?

I truly hope the Board has the fortitude to say “enough is enough” and stick with your original 2-year limit of 8.6%. Otherwise, you will continue to fail Vermonters.

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