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Sent on: Thursday, October 10, 2024 2:56:10 PM

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Subject: Public Comment: Act 167 Community Engagement

A new GMCB Public Comment has been received.

Submit Time: 2024-10-10T14:56:07Z

Name: Emily Jankowski, LCMHC

Affiliation:

Town/City: Newport, Vermont

Topic: Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167

Comment: October 9, 2024 Dear GMCB, As a group of licensed Clinical Mental Health Clinicians, we are writing to add our concern and voice to the recommendation made by the consulting firm hired by the GMCB, Oliver Wyman, to "re-purpose" four hospitals as part of an initiative to curtail costs of medical care in Vermont. We have read about the inaccurate data collected, and the adverse effects closing the hospital will have on our community, but what is most shocking to us is that the report lacked data that was devoted to pediatric care, and pediatric psychiatric care. As clinicians who work directly with children and adolescents we feel obligated to bring up the grave mental health repercussions that would be had if North Country Hospital were to close. There is a strong correlation between physical and mental health - poor health in one area increases the risk of problems in the other. If North Country Hospital were to close it would undoubtedly perpetuate the mental health crisis within the Northeast Kingdom. Our mental health resources are already scarce and inadequate to serve the extensive needs of our community, and we are often floundering to find consistent and timely support for our children. Without pediatric care in our community, we can only imagine how much worse our mental health crisis would be. It's unimaginable. As mental health therapists, we work with extremely vulnerable children and adolescents who face many risks and adversities. Many of our clients are high-risk for early pregnancies, substance and drug abuse, incarceration, and/or human trafficking. Many of our clients have been born into generational trauma through no fault of their own. In addition, without our local hospital, many families would not be able to get their children to medical appointments as there is no public transportation available, and our families would be expected to travel over one and a half hours round trip to the next closest medical facility. How can we ask a family with financial stressors to choose between spending money on gas to get to a medical appointment or purchasing food for the day? Please consider what our future will look like if we have an entire population of children (most of whom are underprivileged to begin with) who have never received routine medical care. The Northeast Kingdom is NOT Chittenden County. We do not have access to the same resources and structures of support that more populated areas have. Taking away our only lifeline to reliable, quality, and local medical care is not only wrong and short-sighted, but catastrophic for the physical and mental health of our children. We beg you to consider the inequity of removing these services from small communities that depend on them for survival. In summary, without local health care access for our clients, we would be failing our children and only perpetuating childhood trauma. What we know is that generational trauma is complex, but we also know that it can be broken, if families have access to quality health care. While closing a rural hospital may seem like a quick cost-saving response, please consider the long-term financial and community ramifications of an entire generation that is restricted access to healthcare. It is our strong

opinion that if GMCB decides to close North Country Hospital, it will cause both immediate and long-term detrimental mental health effects for our Northeast Kingdom families. Respectfully submitted, Emily Jankowski, MS, LCMHC, NCC Cameron Ward, LMSW Laura Lawson, MS,LCMHC, NCC Megan Valley, MA, LCMHC, NCC Kara Campbell-Morin, LMFT Roderic R. Knights, Jr, LICSW John LaBounty, LCMHC Faith Case, MA, MS, LCMHC Kate Goetz, LICSW, I/ECMH-C

Post Comment: Yes