

A new GMCB Public Comment has been received.

Submit Time: 10/11/2024

Name: Ralph Zimmerman

Affiliation:

Town/City: Newport Town

Topic: Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167

Comment:

Letter to Green Mountain Care Board re: The Future of North Country Hospital

Dear Board Members: I am writing in response to the Oliver Wyman “Comprehensive Report on Healthcare Transformation in Vermont” that was recently released to the public. Simply put, if carried out as they have been presented to GMCB, the proposals in this report would have a devastating effect on the health and well-being of the people who live and work in Orleans county and the surrounding communities. And, not only would the proposed changes to the North Country Hospital affect the people in this corner of the State, a re-purposing, and dramatic change in the scope of the services that NCH provides would have a significant spillover effect on hospitals as far away as St. Johnsbury and Burlington. Eight years ago, my wife and I relocated to Newport Center following long careers in the Boston area. Aside from the appeal of natural beauty, and outdoor recreational opportunities, the main drivers for our decision to move here were: 1) a strong sense of community, and 2) access to essential services, including healthcare. Fortunately, in Newport, Vermont, we found both of these to be true. Despite the economic challenges that this region faces, there is a thriving and vibrant community here. We are also fortunate to have comprehensive, broad based healthcare in the name of North Country Hospital and it’s affiliates. It is safe to say that without the services currently provided by North Country, this community would suffer. It is not at all uncommon for the residents in this area to travel to Morristown, Burlington, or Dartmouth, NH, for specialty services that are not part of the NCH scope. Imagine having to travel these distances for more general healthcare? And, what would happen to this community with the significant economic loss that the proposed changes would represent. It is a well established fact that the jobs and salaries that exist because of NCH are critical to the economic vitality of this region. Significantly modifying the scope of services that NCH provides would certainly drive away many of those jobs and salaries. The Oliver Wyman report points to the changing demographics of the state (and in particular, the North East Kingdom) as a rationale for many of it’s recommendations. It rightly highlights the growth of the older age group in our population. As members of this group, we are more likely to draw on healthcare services, and more likely to have subsidized insurance (Medicare or Medicaid, or both). Having said that, the GMCB and AHS should consider that members of this group are also, by and large, active members of our community. We volunteer for local charities. We provide economic support by maintaining homes, and purchasing local goods and services. We foster cultural growth and mentor youth. I would challenge the GMCB to ask what would happen if those of our age group who can afford it are forced to move out of Orleans county because of the significant barriers to healthcare access represented in the Oliver Wyman proposals? The answer is that the majority of those who are left would represent the most needy and least able to support our community in all of these ways. In my view, that would be an existential threat to this area as great as any other. Given the many documented issues related to the Oliver Wyman report, and given the far reaching impact that implementation of the proposals for NCH would have on the greater Newport area, and beyond, I would strongly urge the Green Mountain Care Board to reject those proposals and find a way to support our

local efforts to maintain the high quality of healthcare that NCH represents. Sincerely, Ralph Zimmerman
Newport Center, VT

Post Comment: Yes