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Sent on: Monday, October 30, 2023 12:10:52 PM

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Subject: Public Comment: Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167 2023-10-30T12:10:48Z

A new GMCB Public Comment has been received.

Submit Time: 10/30/2023 12:10:48 PM

Name: Scott Heller

Affiliation: Community Member

Town/City: Newfane

Topic: Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167

Comment: My name is Scott Heller and a number of my thoughts have already been noted by other speakers today (October 27, 2023), both in terms of the quality of care received at Grace Cottage, the importance of the Hospital to our rural community, as well as the dedication of the employees at what is Vermont's (and the nation's) smallest independent acute care facility. I'm a relative newcomer to the area and have been a patient at Grace Cottage for 28+ years. My Husband of 32 years, Daver King, has been a Grace Cottage patient for 53+ years. During that time, we have utilized Grace Cottage's Primary Care Physicians, the Lab, PT and OT services, and most recently the Emergency Department's services for an Angina attack that resulted in me being transported to Bay State for a stent implant to my widowmaker artery. In all our visits to Grace Cottage we have received exemplary care and treatment. There has always been a special place in our heart for Grace Cottage, and approximately 25 years ago, we led efforts to create an EMT Training Center at Grace Cottage that would allow local EMT's to certify/recertify without having to make the trip to Brattleboro and back. For the last 17 years, my Husband and I have owned a Bed & Breakfast that caters primarily to Gay/Bi and Trans Men. We have had many guests fall in love with the region and relocate here, either as a 2nd/weekend/retirement home or they've moved their primary residence to the area. As would be expected, we are frequently asked for referrals to plumbers, electricians, painters... and or course, to be referred to the doctor who might specialize in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally I've observed LGBTQ+ singles, couples and families with LGBTQ+ kids from other states that have anti-LGBTQ+ laws that are moving to southeast Vermont due to the welcoming and progressive nature of our state as exemplified by Governor Phil Scott signing into law legislation that protects access to gender-affirming care. To address the above, Dave and I have assisted with the creation of Grace Cottage's Health Equity Team that targets underserved minority communities, including LGBTQ+, refugees, the BIPOC community and others. The Health Equity Team has been working to improve LGBTQ+ awareness and access, as well as training for employees to provide equitable, knowledgeable, sensitive, and welcoming health care for all, free from discrimination. The Equity Team consists of Grace Cottage Physicians, Physician Assistants, Family Nurse Practitioners, Nurses, support staff, and ourselves as local community members. In our initial meeting with Andrea Seaton and Dr George Terwilliger, we said, "build it and they will come". And they did. Under the diligent efforts of the Health Equity Team, Grace Cottage has earned "Top Performer" status in the Health Equity Index, an annual ranking undertaken by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. The only other hospital in VT to obtain a similar ranking is the VA Hospital in White River Junction. We are extremely proud of and pleased with the efforts of Grace Cottage's Health Equity Team, led by its founding Chair Summer Birch. It is no surprise that as a result of this innovative

and vital initiative that creates a safe, welcoming, and engaging space for many who have felt marginalized by today's health care system, Grace Cottage has been attracting many new patients. Recent press/media coverage of Grace Cottage Hospital's Health Equity Team initiatives have been very positive, including recent articles in Vermont Business Magazine, the Brattleboro Reformer, and Boston Spirit Magazine. The gist of these articles is that the practices instituted through the efforts of Grace Cottage Hospital's Health Equity Team have created a sustainable environment that is good for its employees, good for its patients and good for the community it serves. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences.

Post Comment: Yes