

# ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

DAVID B. DONALDSON  
*Chairman 845-340-3699*

TRACEY A. BARTELS  
*Vice Chair 845-340-3900*



JONATHAN R. HEPPNER  
*Majority Leader 845-340-3900*

KENNETH J. RONK, JR.  
*Minority Leader 845-340-3900*

VICTORIA A. FABELLA  
*Clerk 845-340-3666*

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July 12, 2021

New York State Department of Health  
New York State Office of Mental Health  
New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports  
State Capitol Offices  
Albany, NY

Re: Request to Halt HealthAlliance Hospital Expansion Until Inpatient Mental Health and Detox Beds are Returned to Ulster County

Dear Commissioner Howard Zucker, Commissioner Ann Sullivan, and Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez:

We, the undersigned members of the Ulster County Legislature, join our voices with the chorus of elected officials, health care providers, and community members in urging the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) to deny any application(s) or appeal(s) by Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth) requesting the decertification of inpatient beds licensed to provide behavioral health (mental health and substance use) stabilization and treatment to Ulster County residents at HealthAlliance Hospital. We also strongly urge the OMH to suspend approval for HealthAlliance's Mary's Avenue Building Project pending further review of the Certificate of Need application.

While we greatly appreciate your recent commitments to assess and evaluate health and mental health care needs and available services in Ulster County before any decision is reached, we would be remiss if we did not express the dire and dangerous situation that currently exists.

The approval of Westchester Medical Center Health Network/HealthAlliance's Certificate of Need application was based on the inclusion of existing behavioral health inpatient mental health and detox services in the new building. Eliminating these essential services through the closure of inpatient beds represents a substantive change to that agreement. Moving the behavioral health unit out of HealthAlliance Hospital is a clear violation of the New York State licensing agreement.

As you are no doubt aware, at the beginning of the pandemic, HealthAlliance closed 40 inpatient mental health beds and 20 beds dedicated to chemical dependency and detoxification to make room for an expected surge in local coronavirus patients and moved all mental health inpatient care to WMCHHealth Mid-Hudson Valley Regional Hospital in Dutchess County. The emergency transfer of these vital services appeared to be justified and necessary in the wake of an unknown number of COVID-19 patients who may have been in need of critical care. Our understanding was

that the transfer would be temporary and that there was a comprehensive plan to ensure our community continued to receive vital behavioral-health services. The reality of the situation is no plan materialized, the surge never occurred, and mental health and detox beds were not returned to Ulster County.

WMCHHealth has now applied for permission to eliminate inpatient mental health and substance abuse services permanently. This catastrophic action comes in the middle of a surging opioid and mental-health crisis and after WMCHHealth received commitments for over \$90 million in taxpayer-funded support for capital projects.

WMCHHealth broke its promise to the residents of Ulster County; we now face a very real public health crisis of their making.

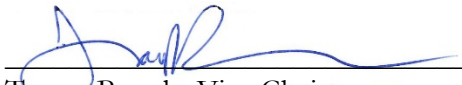
We respectfully call upon you to deny this waiver and insist that WMCHHealth immediately return inpatient mental health and addiction services to Ulster County.

We truly appreciate your time and consideration.

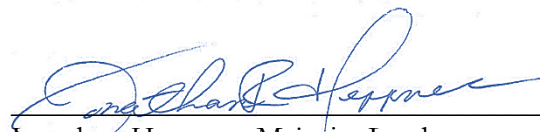
Sincerely,



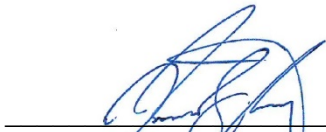
David B. Donaldson, Chairman  
Ulster County Legislature



Tracey Bartels, Vice Chairwoman



Jonathan Heppner, Majority Leader



Kenneth J. Runk, Jr., Minority Leader



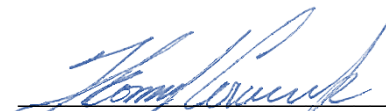
Lynn Archer, District 21



Albert Bruno, District 2



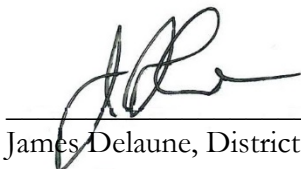
Brian Cahill, District 4



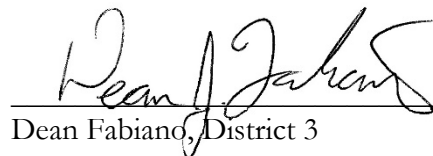
Thomas Corcoran, District 11



Peter Criswell, District 7



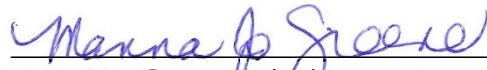
James Delaune, District 17




Dean Fabiano, District 3



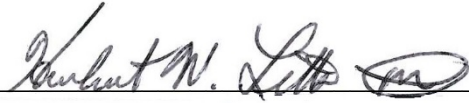
John Gavaris, District 15



Manna Jo Greene, District 19



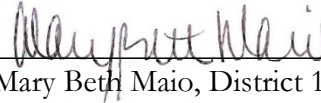
Heidi Haynes, District 18



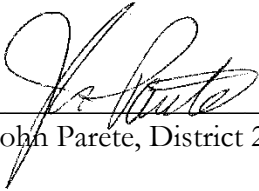
Herbert Litts, III, District 9



Craig Lopez, District 14



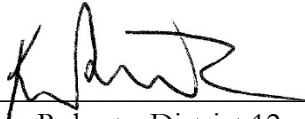
Mary Beth Maio, District 10



John Parete, District 22



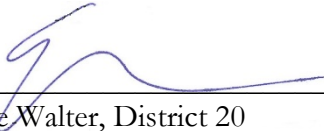
Laura Petit, District 8



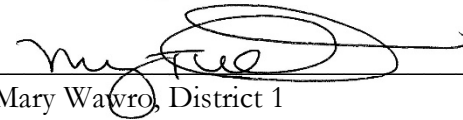
Kevin Roberts, District 12



Abe Uchitelle, District 5



Eve Walter, District 20



Mary Wawro, District 1

cc: Dr. Michael Doyle, MD, Executive Director & CMO, Health Alliance of the Hudson Valley Hospital;  
Senator Brouk, Chair, NYS Senate Mental Health Committee; Assemblywoman Gunther, NYS Assembly Mental Health Committee; Senator Michael Gianaris, NYS Deputy Majority Leader; Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Senate; Honorable Robert G. Ort, NYS Senate Minority Leader; Honorable Carl Heastie, NYS Assembly Speaker; Honorable William Barclay, NYS Assembly Minority Leader; Ulster County's NYS Senate and Assembly Representatives; Honorable Patrick Ryan, Ulster County Executive