



# ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Statement from Chairman Donaldson Holding WMCHHealth Accountable to Hardworking Nurses and the Ulster County Community**

This evening, I cast a "No" vote in protest against a \$1,519,717 contract for forensic pathology services with Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth).

While I understand that it would cost substantially more for the county to contract these same forensic services from another vendor, I cannot agree to give a dime to a corporation that has chosen to dismantle our community's health care delivery system.

During the onslaught of the pandemic, WMCHHealth closed 60 inpatient mental health and detox beds at HealthAlliance Hudson Valley Hospital to make room for an expected surge in local coronavirus patients.

They moved all mental health inpatient care to WMCHHealth Mid-Hudson Valley Regional Hospital in Dutchess County. WMCHHealth told us the transfer would be temporary and that they had a comprehensive plan to ensure our community continued to receive vital behavioral-health services.

No plan materialized, the surge never occurred, and the promised mental health and detox beds were not returned to Ulster County.

It is now obvious that WMCHHealth never intended to move those beds back to Kingston. WMCHHealth profited from the pandemic by eliminating less profitable inpatient mental healthcare in Ulster County despite our continued calls for these vital services to be returned.

In addition, earlier this year the WMCHHealth laid off over 40 hospital staff and claimed they were reducing support staff.

In reality, they cut supervising nurses, put extraordinary strain on its remaining nursing staff, and risk patient safety. Recently, they began to cut even more nursing positions.



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Rather than having compassion and supporting their strained staff, they show callous disregard. Staff reductions have caused existing nurses to do double shifts. The cafeteria nurses and overworked staff depend on to quickly refuel and relax during a break is often closed. Rather than ensuring nurses have support, these short-sighted executives risk more than morale—they risk public health.

My heart goes out to the nurses and other staff who are trying to deliver the best care they can while the administration they work for seems to be doing the opposite.

Born and raised in Kingston, I know first-hand that this is not what our community is about; it is not what Ulster County does.

WMCHHealth is destroying our community hospital and creating a healthcare desert in the heart of Ulster County. This is especially true for those with less means or those that can't go elsewhere.

I believe this is a continued effort to send patients to their other hospitals and reduce our community hospital to nothing more than an intake stop.

We must exert every imaginable legal, moral, and monetary pressure that we can to bring back quality care and the respectability our community hospital once had.

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