



Testimony of Patricia Rehmer, Senior VP, Hartford Healthcare
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
February 19, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations committee, my name is Pat Rehmer and I am the President of the Behavioral Health Network (BHN) for Hartford HealthCare (HHC). The BHN is comprised of The Institute of Living, Rushford Center, Natchaug Hospital, and behavioral health services at Backus hospital, The Hospital of Central Connecticut, St. Vincent's Hospital and Charlotte Hungerford Hospital.

For the past several years I have come before you on nights such as this one to discuss the disparity of inpatient rates for child and adolescent beds at Natchaug hospital compared with other psychiatric services in hospitals and health systems across the state. In 2015 DSS implemented an inpatient reimbursement rate for all general hospital psychiatric services excluding Natchaug Hospital. The range of payment to the general psychiatric units for these services ranges from \$975 to \$1125 per day. Currently Natchaug is reimbursed at \$829.96 a day.

Natchaug is not included in this reimbursement plan as it is not licensed as a general acute care hospital but rather as an Institute For Mental disease (IMD), a federal designation that makes the hospital unable to bill Medicaid for services provided to individuals between the ages of 2 and 64.

Last year the Appropriations committee sought to rectify this payment disparity and required DSS to reimburse Natchaug at \$975 a day beginning in FY 21 and file a State Plan Amendment with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services for that increase in reimbursement. HHC on behalf of the patients we serve were grateful for that recognition, however the Governor's recommended budget adjustments remove the increased funding slated to begin on July 1.

Natchaug is the only provider of inpatient child and adolescent service in the eastern part of the state. We have 24 beds, 6 of which are for children and 18 for adolescents. We have provided care for 179 children and 628 adolescents in the past year. We take patients from anywhere in the state, but we are the provider for all of eastern Connecticut. Natchaug provides all of the necessary and appropriate services for children and adolescents that are provided by general hospital units that are required by CMS. In addition, the hospital provides an on-site school for the patients so that they do not fall behind in their education. This is not required, nor is it offered in all facilities that provide this level of care. The cost of the education service is not included in the inpatient rate but is paid by the patient's local education authority though due to limitations on their obligation to provide for this service we receive payment for only 32% of the school days provided.

I would like to point out that child and adolescent beds in the state are very limited and continue to decrease as last year two hospitals have closed their child and adolescent beds resulting in an increase in substantial wait times in Emergency Departments for children and adolescents. In the past week, we had one day where there were twenty-six children waiting to access inpatient beds in Emergency Departments across the state. Natchaug will not be able to sustain this low reimbursement rate and continue to provide 24 beds for inpatient psychiatric services to children. I urge this committee to keep the increase in funding for Natchaug hospital's reimbursement rate effective 7/1. Thank you for your consideration.