



Testimony of Patricia Rehmer, President, Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network

Submitted to the Appropriations Committee on Wednesday March 3, 2021

Re: HB 6439 an Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 20, 2023 and Making Appropriation Therefore

Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee my name is Patricia Rehmer and I serve as President of the Behavioral Health Network, which is part of Hartford HealthCare. The BHN is the largest provider of mental health and substance use disorder services in the state. It includes the behavioral health services offered at Hartford HealthCare's seven acute care hospitals, the Institute of Living at Hartford Hospital, Natchaug Hospital in Mansfield, and Rushford, which is based in Meriden. The BHN offers inpatient, residential and community-based mental health and addiction treatment services for children, adolescents and adults at locations around the state. I also serve as a co-chair of the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (BHPOC), which is the body that provides legislative oversight to the behavioral health "carve out" of the state's Medicaid program.

I am here before you today to oppose the closing of 8-10 psychiatric residential treatment beds for adolescent boys at the Solnit Children's Center – North Campus. These beds are used to treat adolescent males age 13 to 17 with complex psychiatric needs and are designed to be a bridge from hospital-to-home-and-community or a diversionary placement to avoid the need for a hospital stay. These types of placements help hospitals move children and adolescents out of emergency departments and manage the demand for scarce inpatient beds.

One of the most pressing challenges in behavioral health is the statewide shortage of inpatient and residential beds for children and adolescents. There has been an increase in demand for these types of services and we are already experiencing a higher rate of overdoses and suicides than we did prior to the pandemic. Closing the Solnit beds would be a mistake, resulting in a longer length of stay in our inpatient and Emergency Departments for these children and adolescents.

I would note that our neighbor to the north, Massachusetts, is in the midst of executing a plan to add more than 200 psychiatric beds starting this spring. I would strongly encourage you to look at ways to strengthen behavioral health infrastructure, particularly for children and adolescents.

I thank the committee for considering these concerns. For additional information, contact Kim Harrison at Kimberly.harrison@hhchealth.org

HHC is a fully integrated healthcare system serving 159 towns in Connecticut and employing over 30,000 people. The HHC hospitals are: Backus Hospital in Norwich, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital In Torrington, Hartford Hospital, the Hospital of Central Connecticut in New Britain, MidState Medical Center in Meriden, Windham Hospital, and

St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport. HHC also provides the state's most extensive behavioral health network, a large multispecialty physician group, a clinical care organization, a regional home care system, an array of senior care services, and a large physical therapy and rehabilitation network.