



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 5449: An Act Concerning Certificate of
Need Process**

**Lynne Ide, director of program & policy
Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
March 17, 2022**

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this committee in support of a stronger version of HB 5449. It is high time that our state took a more active role to protect patients and their families from the downside of rampant consolidation in our state's health care sector. I applaud the bill's champions and urge you to listen carefully to the voices of advocates and grassroots activists who are living with the reality of hospital and health care industry consolidation.

Connecticut must act now to prevent more harm. This bill is long overdue.

The issues you are hearing about are not new – they have only gotten worse. I would posit that they have gotten too bad to ignore. From closing labor & delivery services, skimping on investments to meet community health needs, pushing up the cost of care, and making corporate decisions that favor the bottom line over patients – hospital systems are affecting our care, our choices, and our pocketbooks. And this trend has an impact on the ability of Black, Brown and medically underserved people to get equitable, quality care.

Think about this: In 2000, Connecticut had 31 hospitals. Now we have 5 – Griffin, Bristol, Middlesex, CT Children's and UConn Health Center. Day Kimball used to be independent but is in the process of being gobbled up. All the rest are part of larger networks. Hartford HealthCare leads with 8 hospitals and Yale New Haven Health will have 9, if the bid to acquire Waterbury, Manchester and Rockville from Prospect Medical Holdings is approved.

If you add the layer of medical practices, surgical centers and clinics owned by these hospital networks, the landscape gets even more crowded – some might say monopolistic.

Patients are living with the results of this: higher and higher prices, no demonstrable increase in the quality of health outcomes, geographic control of medical care, erosion of local hospital governance, and in some cases, fewer choices of providers.

I ask you – is this good for our health?

As a resident of Windham, I see firsthand the downside of consolidation. In the past decade, Hartford HealthCare has methodically stripped the “community” focus out of what once was Windham Community Memorial Hospital: poorly executed community health needs assessments with no robust local input; replacing the local board with a regional board; shipping of patients to Hartford via helicopter or ambulance (subsidized by our local taxpayers); and more.

Most significantly, Hartford HealthCare downgraded the Intensive Care Unit in 2015. This created a slippery slope for erosion of care options in an already medically underserved part of the state. This move was opposed by the medical doctors in the area. And I must emphasize that no CON approval was required for this.

Hartford HealthCare manufactured a situation that precipitated the closure of labor & delivery services at Windham Hospital in June 2020. To add insult to injury, they had the hubris to ask for permission to do so via a CON application three months later in September 2020.

The Attorney General must be given more authority to step in and stop hospital systems from flouting the rules. What about the funds that Windham Hospital collected for support of its maternity unit? Are they gone? The Attorney General must be able to protect these community assets and the intent of donors.

Right now, Windham, Sharon and Johnson Memorial hospitals are shutting down or have shut down labor and delivery services. This has a profound impact on families and maternal and infant health and equity. (Here is a article from Vox news that outlines what is at stake and features Windham’s fight:

<https://www.vox.com/22923432/maternity-wards-hospitals-covid-19-pandemic>)

When will this stop? It won’t unless you step in.

I have testified at numerous Certificate of Need (CON) hearings regarding hospital conversions or acquisitions. And I spoke before the Task Force set up by the legislature to look at consolidation. The issues are not new, yet our state has not given the Office of Health Strategy the proper resources and tools to crack down on bad actors- and protect our health, our choices of provider and our pocketbooks.

Universal stands ready to help craft a strong bill that will help the people and the communities these hospitals were incorporated to serve. We need the legislature to act this year. We cannot wait.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut’s mission is to accelerate the movement for health justice for everybody because health is a human right and core to social justice and equity.