

Good afternoon, Senator Handley, Representative Willis and distinguished members of the Committee.

My name is André Ouellette. I am a member of the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199 and for the last eleven years, I have been working as a Certified Nursing Assistant at UCONN's John Dempsey Hospital.

John Dempsey is unique and uniquely valuable as our state's only public acute care medical facility. We need to preserve its public mission and public service. The quality, scope and access of the care and services Dempsey provides are not duplicated elsewhere in our acute care system.

I work on the Cardiac Unit, where we see many patients come in with conditions like pulmonary hypertension, a terminal disease that is very expensive to treat. For example, an immigrant to our country who lacks health insurance was admitted with pulmonary hypertension to our unit. When she got her diagnosis and recommended course of treatment, she and her family panicked at the cost of the necessary medication. The drug she needed, Flolan, costs about \$150,000 annually to treat the disease. But because we are a public hospital, a teaching hospital and a research facility, we were able to include her in a research trial which would provide her the medication she needed to extend her life on an ongoing basis. This is especially important because Flolan is not a drug you can go on and

off. Our public mission permitted us to administer state-of-the-art treatment to an indigent patient without health insurance.

But it's not just the poor and uninsured that benefit from Dempsey's health care mission. Recently I dealt with a well-insured couple, who came to Dempsey with complicated medical and psychiatric issues and were being treated simultaneously at the hospital. They were deeply impressed by Dempsey's multi-disciplinary approach and coordination of care across departments, dealing with the medical consequences of psychotropic drug treatment in a complementary and holistic fashion. This broad approach was far more effective than patching together services across multiple institutions with more narrow foci.

I've worked in both public and private acute care settings. What makes Dempsey special is that there are hundreds of health professionals like me who share a long-term commitment to carrying out the mission of truly public health care. We are able to offer state-of-the-art care to everyone, regardless of circumstances or means, because we are publicly supported with the tools and resources necessary to provide that level of care.

The high quality of care we can give, and the low rate of turnover in our hospital are the result of the state's commitment - so far - to ensuring access to the best available care to all regardless of ability to pay or severity of condition. We cannot meet this important public goal without John Dempsey Hospital.