

Dear Madame Chair and Distinguished Committee Members:

In May of 2011, I wrote a letter to the editor of the Hartford Courant expressing my deep concern for the possibility that, as a matter of policy and funding, the level of care at The Connecticut Hospice might be downgraded as well as the level of care at other hospice care organizations.

Since then, on two occasions when I visited the Connecticut Hospice to sing for the patients, the families of the patients and the care-givers, I have become even more passionate about the issue, which is what happens when you deal with policy in flesh-and-blood terms, rather than in the hypothetical, on papers with columns of numbers.

Allow me to excerpt a few portions of my letter to the editor and make some additional remarks in this letter that I would be grateful and honored for you to consider as you deliberate changes in policy or practice at Connecticut Hospice.

*I wrote, last June: "The issue being debated regarding lowering the standards for the quality of hospice care in Connecticut has me deeply saddened and worries me that, as a sign of our times, the care we owe people at perhaps the most sacred, sensitive, potentially beautiful part of their life – their last chapter before passing – will now become diminished as it becomes part of the frequently painful cutbacks that we see all around us."*

*Further, I wrote, "I worry that our society, having to attend to the bottom line of pragmatics and money, will be depriving itself of an essential dimension of respect for life that could injure us deeply, and bruise our, already deeply bruised American heart."*

I feel that at this point in our lives, as Americans, we need to hold on to some things that demonstrate that we truly do care about each other. Some things are sacred and, even though as a nation, we will surely have to make sacrifices on many levels, for our dignity and our pride, we need to prioritize a few basic things, one of them being the last chapter of the lives of those who will soon leave us.

Here are imperative areas as I see as basic to the humanity of our nation. Without our being able to point to our refusal to be compromised in these two areas, I believe that we will, rightfully, have to hang our collective heads in shame.

- The first is care for the elderly and the young in their last chapters of their lives.
- The second is our children's health and education.

As a society, even though times are tough, financially and in other ways, I submit that for us to hold our heads up high we have to show ourselves and the next generation that we believed in something – that just as our war dead are not easily left behind, we have the courage, the decency and the caring heart as a nation to hold the line on some essentials, no matter how tough things get.

Please, as you consider the economics of the situation, please ask yourself what it is you would want to stand for if you were to be asked the following two questions by, let us say, a grandchild:

“How important did you feel the care of your parents was in that last period of time before they died? How important is it to you that I make your passing a beautiful, painless, caring, heartfelt last few weeks, days or hours?”

In spite of the challenges of these times, let's make sure that we have answered these questions with words that make us proud of what we stand for at this moment in our history.

I send you my gratitude for allowing me the privilege of sharing these few words.

With great respect,

Peter Yarrow

Peter, Paul and Mary

Board Member of The Connecticut Hospice