

MergerWatch Project

Protecting Patients' Rights
When Hospitals Merge

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February 15, 2013

Senators Harp and Kane and Representatives Walker and Miner
Appropriations Committee
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Sent via EMAIL

Chairs and Ranking Members of the Appropriations Committee:

It has come to our attention that Governor Malloy has proposed consolidating the legislative commissions into a single agency to be called the Commission on Citizen Advocacy. This proposal would merge the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) with the commissions on children, Asian-Americans, Latinos and African-Americans and would eliminate the commission on aging. We feel strongly that PCSW can only fulfill its mission of fighting against gender discrimination if it is maintained as a separate and distinct agency.

MergerWatch is a national women's health advocacy organization based in New York City whose mission is to protect access to reproductive health care services in communities where hospitals are considering partnerships with religiously-sponsored hospitals. Our organization has been privileged to work with the PCSW on a number of hospital merger cases in Connecticut, most notably the Waterbury case.

PCSW was instrumental in facilitating communication with key elected officials to express reservations about the structure of a proposed joint venture between a Texas-based for-profit health system and Waterbury's two hospitals, St. Mary's Hospital and Waterbury Hospital. Plans to build a \$400 million replacement hospital, which were initially supported by local and state officials, were problematic for women's health advocates. The new hospital would have been required to follow religious restrictions at the request of St. Mary's, effectively wiping out local access to reproductive health care services. Because of PCSW's respected political position, the parties involved were required to create a viable solution so that the women of Waterbury would continue to receive health services they have always expected in their community. In the end, the deal fell apart because the proposal presented to PCSW was found to be financially weak.

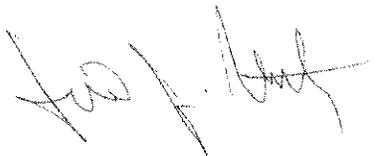
We firmly believe that without PCSW's active role, a critical analysis of the proposed hospital merger would have fallen on deaf ears and women in need of certain reproductive services would have been shut out of a new hospital serving the rest of the community. Given that 60% of maternity patients are Medicaid recipients in Waterbury, this situation would have been a travesty. Due to PCSW's expert negotiations at the state level, community access to reproductive services has been preserved and Waterbury Hospital has begun merger talks with another potential merger partner.

No other state-based advocacy organization has the capacity and the political will to fight for Connecticut women like the PCSW. As the research and public policy arm of the General Assembly, the PCSW holds the State of Connecticut accountable for policies and practices that are discriminatory to women or that fail to advance the status of women. This case exemplifies the level at which PCSW can advocate for the women of Connecticut.

The work goes beyond the fight to preserve hospital-based health care access. Their efforts to fight for women's equality extend to such areas as government, education and the workplace. Now is not the time to cut PCSW funding and consolidate this vital advocacy organization into an umbrella commission.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our experience working with PCSW, please contact Director Lois Uttley at lois@mergerwatch.org or 212-870-2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lois J. Uttley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lois J. Uttley
Director