

**TESTIMONY OF DR. PERUVEMBA VENKATESH
SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Friday, February 27, 2015**

Good evening Chairwoman Walker and Chairwoman Bye and members of the Appropriations committee, my name is Dr. Peruvamba Venkatesh and I am a physician and the Associate Director for the Department of Medicine as well as the Associate Program Director for UCONN Internal Medicine Training Program at Hartford Hospital. I care for patients and manage the training of young physicians from the University of Connecticut at the Health Center.

I realize that the Governor and all of you are dealing with difficult economic times and I don't relish the decisions you have to make in the coming months.

However, two years ago hospitals across the state faced daunting cuts due to the state budget difficulties of the last biennium. We at Hartford Healthcare had to make lots of decisions that affected people's lives, not only our patients but also our employees who every day deliver great care at our five acute care hospitals across the state-Hartford, Meriden, New Britain, Norwich and Windham.

When we were cut by \$111 million in 2013 we had to make many difficult choices. These included closing an adult psychiatric clinic, allied health schools, a physical therapy office and nursing units. Also we reduced hours of service to cardiac rehabilitation, infusion and wound centers. For our employees the cuts meant implementation of a new health plan with significant cost sharing; raising the requirement for employee to access health benefits from 20 hours to 24 hours per week; and a cost of living increase that went down from 3% to 1.2%. Finally, 375 positions were eliminated that year. In 2014 there were further staffing reductions amounting to 405 positions being eliminated, the bulk of those coming from Hartford Hospital, where I work.

Looking at the proposed budget for DSS, the reduction of the Medicaid provider rates, elimination of the low- cost hospital provider pool and an increase in the hospital provider tax represents a significant cut to all hospitals in the state. At this point it is hard to pin down an exact number for our health system as so much is still unknown.

When I joined Hartford Hospital 20 years ago, my primary responsibility was caring for the inner city population of Hartford in the inpatient and outpatient arena. Further reduction of provider rates (as we are already appealing our 2015 rate) puts in great jeopardy the ability to run our Brownstone clinic that has 50,000 patient visits a year. Under this proposed budget, clinic hours would be severely reduced and some services dropped. With the proposed changes to the HUSKY A parent population moving to the Health Exchange, there is no doubt that we will see an increase in uninsured patients trying to access the Brownstone.

We understand the complexity and the tough choices required that come when creating budgets. You've got big decisions to make, many of which will affect the lives of thousands across the state. If these proposed cuts to health care were to become reality, we at Hartford HealthCare



would be forced to: restrict operations or even close clinics on our other campuses, close inpatient and outpatient services across the system, reduce behavioral health programs including our schools that on average serves more than 200 students a day. Not only will services to our patients be affected but it will mean another round of staff reductions.