



St. Monica's Episcopal Church

3575 Main St. Hartford, Connecticut 06120

Telephone: 860-522-7761 Fax: 860-722-9533

The Reverend Tracy Johnson, Priest-in-Charge

To: Co-Chairpersons Senator Terry B. Gerratana and Rep. Matthew Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee

My name is Rev. Tracy Johnson Russell. I am the Priest-in-Charge at St. Monica's Episcopal Church here in Hartford. I thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the March 11, 2015 Public Hearing in support of critical efforts to make health care more accessible and affordable, including S.B. 809, S.B. 810, S.B. 813, S.B. 815, S.B. 954 and H.B. 6938.

For more than a decade I have served as a member of a group of New Haven-area religious leaders who oversee the Ecumenical Free Bed Fund at Yale-New Haven Hospital. The monies that make up the Fund were established over 100 years ago, since before Yale-New Haven Hospital was called that. Its purpose is to ensure that the indigent not be refused hospital treatment. After learning about hundreds of families whose homes and cars were being seized by Yale-New Haven, I participated in a successful effort to pass a law requiring hospitals across the state to inform patients of the existence of free care and charitable funds for bills their families cannot pay. That effort was about fairness through transparency. My interest in the bills before you today is again, fairness through transparency.

For the past seven years I have advocated for health care reform as a leader of the Interfaith Fellowship for Universal Health Care. We were successful in our effort to pass reforms here in Connecticut and on a national level that resulted in millions more Americans having decent health coverage. I am worried that the access to affordable care that we worked so hard to achieve is now being eroded by the rapidly rising cost of hospital care. As the Connecticut hospital industry maneuvers to consolidate, to merge, and to acquire physician practices, we need our elected leaders to play a bigger role in preventing the increase in costs caused by these market maneuvers.

We need a limit on facility fees as proposed in S.B. 809, although I encourage the committee to examine the issue as thoroughly as possible to see if the ban can be extended to more procedures. There is no justification for these facility fees. And we need transparency around prices charged for all procedures. The extreme, arbitrary discrepancies in what hospitals and clinics charge are now well documented and are completely unfair. Several bills before you address price transparency. I support requiring the reporting of prices, as in S.B. 813, to inform any effort to study health care cost containment. The bill should be clarified to ensure that all of the various prices paid by various payers are available to anyone who wants to see them. The study is important but it must be informed by an immediate requirement for price transparency.

Health care is about working to stay healthy and healing from illness and injury. As much as price, we need to know how well our system is taking care of us. For this reason, I also support the transparency requirement that hospitals report health outcomes, also part of S.B. 813. Our congregations and our communities will be better served when our State knows how health care outcomes differ between facilities. Individuals and families are being asked to carry an ever bigger portion of health care bills. We are directly affected by facility fees, by arbitrary, unfair pricing and by the lack of information about the quality of care.