



**UNITE HERE!**

Testimony Before the Committee on Public Health, Connecticut General Assembly

February 23, 2016

Re: Support for S.B. 5211, An Act Concerning Certificates of Need

Bob Proto, President, Local 35 UNITE HERE  
Laurie Kennington, President, Local 34 UNITE HERE  
Constance Holt, Secretary-Treasurer, Local 217 UNITE HERE  
Aaron Greenberg, Chair, GESO-UNITE HERE

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley and Representative Srinivasan: Thank you for taking the time to further examine the statutes governing Connecticut's Certificate of Need process. We are the leaders of UNITE HERE's locals in Connecticut, Locals 34, 35 and the Graduate Student Employees Organization (GESO) at Yale University, and Local 217, which represents 2,500 hospitality workers statewide. Collectively our organizations advocate for comprehensive health benefits for more than 8,000 Connecticut residents.

The health care system is changing at lightning speed. In the past two years, with leadership from the Public Health Committee, the General Assembly has equipped the Office of HealthCare Access, the Attorney General, and other state agencies with a broad array of tools to ensure that corporate changes in health care benefit rather than harm patients.

The legislation establishing those tools, notably Public Acts 14-168 and 15-146, was designed for one overarching purpose: to protect consumers, taxpayers and health care professionals from the consequences of rapid consolidation in our health care system. As a consequence, OHCA and the Attorney General now have the duty to examine the impact of mergers on cost, access and community benefits, and power to do so that exceeds most states.

However, based on recent events at Windham Hospital, it is clear that the committee's work is not complete.

When Hartford HealthCare took over Windham Hospital five years ago, the community was assured that there would be no reductions in services. Last year, however, Hartford announced that it would transform Windham's Critical Care Unit into a step-down unit incapable of handling the severity of cases normally seen in a CCU.

Despite receiving petitions from thousands of local residents opposing those changes, OHCA ruled that Hartford's changes to Windham did not require a Certificate of Need. Since the changes took place, there have been reports of patients being transported by helicopter to Hartford for services previously rendered at Windham, and community concerns that seniors and residents without cars will be at risk for adverse outcomes due to transportation difficulties in reaching Hartford Hospital.

In our view, the General Assembly's intent over the past few years has been crystal clear: the agencies responsible for reviewing health care consolidation must act more aggressively to ensure the public's access to high quality, cost effective care delivered in the appropriate setting.

We urge the committee to pass HB 5211 to further clarify the Certificate of Need process so that the public's voice will be heard and need for access will be protected in the ongoing corporate transformation of our health care system.