

TESTIMONY OF KAREN ZRENDA, OLD LYME, CT
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
(Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments for Biennium Ending 6/30/2107)
FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and the members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Karen Zrenda from Old Lyme, and I would like to address the Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments.

I am testifying on behalf of myself and many of the CT families who are unable to be here today because of their extraordinary responsibility of caring for a sick or chronically-ill child. My personal experience and 20+years of working alongside many of these families knows all too well the challenge of coming to Hartford to testify at a hearing when you provide care for a child with special health care needs. The cost, time and planning makes this prohibitive for those who desperately need the critical services provided by the hospitals in CT.

While I am currently employed by YNHCH as a support for families of children with chronic and special health care diagnoses, my personal relationship with YNHCH dates back 25 years. I cannot overstate the importance for a hospital to have the resources it needs to provide the complex and specialized care our children and families need. Funding plays a large role in hiring the best and most experienced doctors and nurses. If you have ever needed surgery or treatment for a serious illness for yourself or someone you love, you know how important that is - so important that it could be the difference between life and death.

And in the case of children, the support services to help a child and family cope with the trauma and frightening experiences of some treatments are just as important to help endure what are months, years and sometimes a lifetime of special care and coping.

In my short time as a staff member of the hospital, I am witness to an environment that is focused on providing safe and quality care at a pace I have never witnessed in any other workplace. I am in awe of the commitment by nurses and doctors, who step up to the plate – unwavering – in a moment's notice when trauma and emergencies arise, oftentimes working long hours in a role that requires specialized, intense interventions. I observe the ongoing commitment of hospital leadership to bring in the most experienced, highly respected specialists so that families don't have to leave the state to get the best medical care. And I feel the support of an employer who recognizes the value of these employees and does what it can to pay meaningful salaries and provide the benefits needed by their families.

Our personal health and that of our families and loved ones is a critical issue – and good health is a blessing you don't always realize and appreciate until it is in jeopardy. Then it becomes the central issue in your life as it affects everything. You will absolutely need and want the best medical care. I have to believe those suggesting cutting Medicaid reimbursement, as proposed in the budget before you to solve the state's budget deficit, have had the good fortune of not needing these critical care hospitals. Ignorance is bliss – but it will do more harm than good. Why balance the budget on the backs of hospitals that provide such an important and critical service to all of your constituents – especially those hospitals that are able to successfully treat those who are chronically and critically ill?

Please reconsider this approach to balancing the budget and reject the 30 million dollar cut, which becomes a 90 million dollar loss for hospitals, by restoring these much needed funds. Not doing so makes no sense to me. And should you be in need of the expertise of a well-trained and experienced medical team in CT, it will not make sense to you either.