



Testimony of

Heather Howlett

Chief Steward, Windham Memorial Community Hospital Employees United,
AFT Local 5099, AFL-CIO

Certificate of Need (CON) Taskforce
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My name is Heather Howlett. I've been a patient care tech in the Emergency Department of Windham Hospital for nearly 26 years. I'm also the chief steward for Windham Memorial Community Hospital Employees United, AFT Local 5099.

As this task force may not know, our union currently has strong provisions in our contract that require hospital management to negotiate with us before they can subcontract any work duties or positions we represent at Windham and we have the contractual right to negotiate future proposed cut-backs, shut-downs or an eventual closure of the hospital.

We also have language in our contract, called successor language, that would apply if Windham Hospital is ever sold to a new owner. This successor language would legally obligate any new owner to recognize our union and honor our contract.

In our current contract negotiations, Hartford HealthCare is seeking to eliminate these provisions.

Our union is fighting to keep them, because those provisions do more than protect jobs. They give us a voice in changes at our hospital — a way to speak out to protect our professional standards and in turn protect the high quality of patient care at Windham.

Should we lose these provisions, the Certificate of Need process will become more important than ever. It will be one of the few ways left for caregivers like us to have a voice in the rapidly changing healthcare landscape in Connecticut.

When Hartford HealthCare executives first announced cuts at Windham last summer, we sounded the alarm about what that would mean for our ability to do our jobs and care for our patients.

But the cuts happened anyway—over the protests of our entire community. These cuts have included reducing caregiver staff and patient beds.

Lower staffing levels means we can't spend the time we used to spend with our patients, so that we can explain to them what's going on. If you've ever needed emergency care or been hospitalized, you know how confusing it can be, and how important it is for you and your family to understand what's happening with your medical care during that experience.

Hartford HealthCare executives have already blamed the reduced patient census for cutting good jobs at Windham Hospital. Our union believes transferring patient beds to other Hartford Healthcare Hospitals is a violation of our contract as it has a direct effect on the terms and conditions of our members' employment.

As a chief steward, I can tell you that employee morale is down and stress is way up. We've seen our hospital slide more and more into the red every year and as a consequence, management has made drastic cuts and changes to our work environment.

But at the same time, Hartford HealthCare executives have been handed huge salaries and bonuses. The network is thriving. And a new Hartford HealthCare doctors' office building has gone up right behind Windham.

What's happened at Windham is a perfect example of why we believe that the CON process should look beyond single facilities and consider the financial health of a network as a whole when considering whether to allow conglomerates to get rid of jobs and cut or downsize vital patient care services.

We need the state health department to take on more oversight to ensure they are putting dedicated employees and patients before profits.

As this task force writes its recommendations, please remember that our hospitals and healthcare system are here to serve patients—not the other way around.

Thank you for hearing our voices today.