

9/29/20

To All House Finance Members

Re: Testimony to be read at the Eleanor Slater Hospital Hearing today

As you meet today to discuss the budget issues and redesign proposal for Eleanor Slater Hospital, I am writing in support of the hospital and for your careful review of all information as your committee will be making critical financial decisions that will impact our most vulnerable fellow Rhode Islanders.

If you are not aware, Eleanor Slater Hospital is a unique and vital facility **committed** to providing quality care to patients with complex medical and psychiatric illnesses. This is done across two locations; the Pastore and Zambarano campuses. While many law makers and community members do not fully understand the role of Eleanor Slater Hospital, I would like to share my sentiments as an Occupational Therapist who has worked on both campuses with over 18 years of clinical experience. I would like to attest to the level of function achieved here by patients who would otherwise, decline and fail in alternative placements.

Many of our patients are admitted after extensive acute hospitalizations, multiple failed nursing homes placements, families unable to care for their complex needs, limited community group home placements for Traumatic Brain Injury or those who do not qualify for services as non-U.S. citizens. It is here that such patients receive rehabilitative services, social services, mental health services and comprehensive medical care, which would not be provided elsewhere for them. These services collectively meet every essential need for the quality, longevity, and functional independence that our patients are fortunate to receive by this great model of care.

While the focus of care should always be on patients living in the least restrictive environment, many do not realize that for some, **this is** that place. Eleanor Slater Hospital has fulfilled such a valuable role for Rhode Islanders in greatest need with unparalleled results. Those who are behaviorally and physically challenged have achieved a level of independence and freedom that would not be available in alternative settings based on their complexity.

Here, patients are custom fit to operate power and manual wheelchairs despite all physical challenges and deformities. They participate in cognitive rehabilitation after brain injury, are treated by Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapy, benefit from therapeutic recreation, a sensory stimulation room, horticulture gardening program, religious services and extensive wound care services. In no other environment would patients have the equipment they need, time to recover and rehabilitate, and work toward community reintegration for long term success. Our hospital has enabled them to live and thrive in this way!

With a recent focus on the financial crisis of the hospital, it is our job to explore ways to increase our financial stability. As we stand at a pivotal crossroad, we are at risk of failing to keep our promise to those patients in need in the state of RI. While we can and should meet our ethical and our legal obligations to discharge long term residents who do not meet hospital level of care, we must not do so before considering **all critical factors** that will have negative long-term impacts, causing functional and medical decline. For some, discharge from this setting would strip them of their independence and increase their risk of physical and psychological deterioration. This would ultimately generate even greater need and financial costs, with continued readmissions to acute hospitals.

It would be a great moral injustice to overlook many who are not able to advocate for themselves. Eleanor Slater Hospital is a hospital to invest in as it is invaluable to our community. We must ask...who will address the needs of those patients who cannot return home, do not belong in nursing home settings, or have not succeeded in our community mental health system? Please assist us in recommitting our promise to the mission of this hospital, no matter how long this process may take. As a pioneer in RI politics and champion for those with mental health needs in our community, we remember the unmatched spirit and efforts of Eleanor Slater herself.

As Governor Sundlun said in 1994, "Rhode Island is a better place because of Eleanor Slater." May our small state continue its great work in protecting and caring for our own with the exemplary care at Eleanor Slater Hospital. Simply ask all those here! Thank you for your careful deliberation and consideration and I thank all our administration for their support!

Respectfully,

Lisa Kline, OTR/L, Occupational Therapy, Eleanor Slater Hospital, Zambarano Unit

Lisa.kline@bhddh.ri.gov 401.567.5492