

ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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May 23, 2020

Michael D. Israel
President & Chief Executive Officer
Westchester Medical Center
100 Woods Rd.
Valhalla, NY 10595

Dear Mr. Israel,

First and foremost, I would like to thank you and praise the heroic efforts of each and every member of your staff, who have put themselves at great personal risk to deliver compassionate and professional care to our residents since the very first case of COVID-19 appeared in our region. We also deeply appreciate the work HealthAlliance leadership has done in partnering with Ulster County on several initiatives enabling expanded coronavirus testing and treatment for all of our residents. During these challenging times, I am confident that our close partnership will continue to ensure the highest quality of care for all residents of Ulster County and the region.

It was only a few short months ago that we ceremoniously broke ground on a \$92.9 million retrofit of HealthAlliance's Mary's Avenue campus, primarily funded by New York State, and celebrated a future vision of a new world-class health center that will serve Ulster County and the wider region. A key part of that vision was HealthAlliance's explicit commitment to offering behavioral health services in the new facility. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has understandably upended lives and best laid plans. In late March, the New York State Department of Health identified the Mary's Avenue campus for an urgent conversion as a potential regional COVID-19 specialized care center. In early April, HealthAlliance temporarily shut down forty inpatient mental health beds and twenty beds dedicated to chemical dependency and detoxification to make room for the potential coronavirus surge.

I applaud HealthAlliance's willingness to facilitate the use of Mary's Avenue campus as a crisis center for the pandemic when the need appeared to be urgent, but I am very concerned that those preparations may have paved the way for the permanent diminishment of vital behavioral health services in our community. Although the need for COVID-19 surge capacity has thankfully been averted, HealthAlliance has been unwilling to commit to reactivating any of the sixty behavioral health beds that were impacted. Given the

critical need for these behavioral health services in Ulster County, which will only be compounded by a likely surge in need due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the loss of these beds would be devastating.

While a temporary solution has been put in place, in which the Emergency Department at the HealthAlliance Broadway campus in Kingston serves as the initial intake point for behavioral health crises, this approach results in a decrease in service quality for our residents and has negatively impacted a number of dedicated healthcare workers. For example, many patients from Ulster County must ultimately be transported to facilities outside the immediate community to receive required care, and several longtime healthcare workers have been laid off or forced to commute long distances to keep their jobs.

A crucial part of the recovery process for those experiencing behavioral health challenges is found in having access to a robust local support network of close relatives, friends, caregivers, and community members. As we continue to see a dramatic rise in mental health issues and substance abuse as a result of the pandemic, now more than ever, we must guarantee that all residents have ample access to vital local services and come together to ensure our community is receiving the support it deserves.

Given our record of partnership, I am confident that working together we can resolve these challenges and ensure our community's health and safety. We must move quickly and collaboratively, and as such I am requesting a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss and reaffirm HealthAlliance's commitment to deliver the absolute best quality behavioral health services to the residents of Ulster County, both now and in the future.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patrick K. Ryan', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Patrick. K. Ryan

Ulster County Executive