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**MATTIE HUNTER
MAJORITY CAUCUS CHAIR
STATE SENATOR - 3RD DISTRICT**

November 24, 2020

Ms. Debra Savage
Chair
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 W. Jefferson Street, 2nd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62761

Dear Ms. Savage:

I am urging the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board to deny authorization for Trinity Health Corporation to close Mercy Hospital and Medical Center and Mercy Health System of Chicago, as requested in Application #20-039.

Mercy Hospital has a long and distinguished history of serving the neighborhoods in my district, and continues that legacy today despite the fiscal challenges encountered by many U.S. hospitals in the current healthcare environment. Of the 39 acute care facilities in Chicago, Mercy Hospital is one of just 12 hospitals that remain open south of the Stevenson Expressway.

Relative to other areas of Chicago, the area served by Mercy Hospital could easily be characterized as a "healthcare desert." Should Mercy Hospital cease to operate, the next closest facilities would be Northwestern Memorial Hospital (3.6 miles away), University of Illinois Hospital (4.1 miles), and Provident Hospital (3.4 miles). When a medical emergency occurs at McCormick Place or Soldier Field, Mercy Hospital is no more than 6 minutes away, however, if Mercy Hospital is permitted to cease operations, then alternate transport to Northwestern Memorial or the University of Illinois Hospital would typically take over twice as long. For a stroke or heart attack victim, those minutes can mean the difference between life and death.

Mercy Hospital is also focused on addressing the extraordinary healthcare challenges in the population it primarily serves. In fact, the application for closure submitted by Trinity Health outlines the very reasons why Mercy Hospital should not be allowed to cease serving the residents of my district. The difference in average life span between residents of affluent areas on the North Side compared to residents of the South Side is measured in decades. The vast majority of this difference is due to lack of adequate management of chronic health conditions. Addressing this disparity requires a healthcare system that is focused on recognizing the additional barriers to good health that are prevalent in my district, including social determinants of health. An outpatient facility alone, as proposed by Trinity Health, will not be sufficient to address these problems. Larger, vertically integrated healthcare systems that are located far from my constituents are less able to integrate into the neighborhoods of my district, and would not have the same focus on the unique needs of the patients currently served by Mercy Hospital.

Ms. Debra Savage
November 24, 2020
Page Two

Trinity Health does not “own” Mercy Hospital in the same context as a for-profit corporation would own an asset. Trinity Health holds this community asset in trust, operating it for the benefit of the citizens of Illinois. Trinity Health and its charitable predecessors have enjoyed decades of tax-exempt status in return for providing charitable care and benefit to the community. Such obligations were easier to fulfill in past years without today’s financial challenges, however, the fiduciary obligation to meet commitments to the community in return for tax exempt status continues even in the face of financial challenges. Closure of Mercy Hospital and Mercy Health System would constitute failure of Trinity Health to meet its obligations, a failure which cannot be rectified solely by promising a future outpatient facility.

The real estate value of the properties associated with Mercy Hospital provides a strong incentive for Trinity Health to liquidate the facility rather than arrange for its continued operation by another charitable entity. I do not doubt that other nonprofit healthcare systems in Chicago have declined to take on the responsibility for reinventing Mercy Hospital and Mercy Health System, however, I am equally certain that there are viable alternatives to depriving my constituents of the resources of Mercy Hospital.

I have personally met with a management team that has a plan to preserve Mercy Hospital and refocus Mercy Health System on health promotion and disease prevention. As long as such options exist that would better meet the needs of my constituents, Trinity Health should not be granted permission to proceed with its plan to close Mercy Hospital. Furthermore, since a prolonged climate of uncertainty would make the eventual turnaround of Mercy Hospital even more challenging, it is vital that Trinity Health’s application for closure be denied expeditiously.

Thank you for safeguarding the interests of the citizens of Illinois Senate District 3.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mattie Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mattie Hunter
Majority Caucus Chair
Illinois State Senator
3rd Legislative District