

Courtney Avery, Administrator  
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board  
525 West Jefferson, Second Floor  
Springfield, IL 62761

Re: Quincy Medical Group Hospital, Project #20-044

Dear Ms. Avery,

I am writing in opposition of Quincy Medical Group Hospital. I am proud to be a Blessing Health System employee, and I want this Board to get a full understanding of just how much Blessing has done during the pandemic. I believe no other healthcare system is capable or willing to do these things. The pandemic continues to test us, but it has also shown us that Blessing is unique in its unwavering commitment to serving our community.

I have worked at Blessing for 2.5 years. My employers prior to Blessing have had much different experiences surviving this pandemic. A former health system that I worked at for many years and my children still work for required every employee to take off two weeks unpaid throughout the year and also furloughed over 1000 employees long-term. They had discontinued necessary services to be able to stay open and provide a basic level of care to their patients. The other employer that I worked for immediately prior to joining the Blessing team is a nationwide healthcare consulting company. They have always been considered a premium employer, but they have been crippled by this pandemic. They have laid off a large number of employees permanently. By contrast, I have never once been concerned for my job or worried about my income. I was able to focus on what I needed to do for our community because I was taken care of by Blessing. I am proud to be able to tell my story and that my story is a positive one in the face of this really hard year, because I work for an organization who planned for the future even though we never could dream of what that future would bring.

As COVID was ravaging our communities, Blessing didn't skip a beat and acted quickly in ways that supported patient care and staff. There are countless things I could share about the ways we were supported, I'm going to highlight a few:

- We continuously assessed staffing needed to provide care in inpatient units.
- We committed to keeping all beds open and using COVID waivers to allow us to open more inpatient beds to ensure those that needed a bed would have access to one.
- We opened an additional ICU with 13 ICU beds.
- We opened an additional 20 med/surg beds so we could treat anyone who walked through our doors.
- Chief Accounting officer, Tim Moore called me and told me to let him know what we needed and gave me his cell number. He said he would make sure he removed all barriers to get what we needed. Thanks to his support we were able to purchase 20 additional cardiac monitors to create additional ICU beds, portable intubation equipment so our ICU teams could respond to patients needs anywhere in the building, and we brought in additional ventilators.
- Our psych department created an emotional support hotline for our employees during this stressful season. They also made rounds throughout the inpatient units to talk to staff and make sure they were emotionally taken care of.

Our Chief Nursing Officer asked me daily what I needed to keep the units running and how many staff I needed to make it through each day. Some of the support he provided includes:

- We created a bonus contract process for all acute care units to allow our own full time staff to make \$30/hour more for working extra shifts if they chose to work more. This allowed us to meet staffing

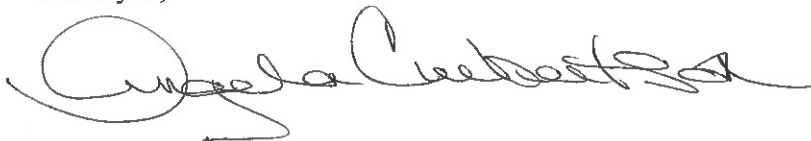
demands. This also allowed those employees to make more money at Blessing without looking outside the community to pick up extra shifts. Many of our staff have spouses who were laid off due to COVID. This increase in pay helped them make the money they needed for their families, while also helping us meet our staffing needs.

- We brought in 23 traveling nurses and have made adjustments as necessary due to the market demand for traveling nurses across the country. The entire executive team signed off on our staffing requests.
- We created Critical needs per diem RN and LPN positions for nurses in the community who wanted to work at Blessing to help during the pandemic. We created the pay structure for these positions to be competitive with traveling agencies so local nurses could stay in the community and work at Blessing instead of seeking agency work elsewhere. Through these positions, we hired multiple nurses who had been laid off or furloughed from other local healthcare employers, helping our community nurses stay employed and also meeting our staffing needs.
- My education team cross trained over 500 staff members from other areas of our corporation to work on the inpatient units. They cross trained people to work in housekeeping, to help with food and nutrition, and on the nursing units to help as nurse assistants and team RNs.
- We created a compassion companion program to provide for our patients who couldn't have their families at their bedside. This team of people were deployed to sit and visit with patients or watch tv or whatever they needed.
- We bought 14 Ipads and rolling stands to keep on the units to be able to help our patients facetime and skype with their families and also allow our physicians and nurses to conference call the families during rounds so they could be present for their loved one's rounds.

It may not seem like it, but this is just a short list of things we were able to do to keep our patients and staff safe during the pandemic. For many of us we were just doing our job, working around the clock when needed, but we were successful because there was an unwavering commitment from the Blessing team to do everything possible to get everyone through this. I do not believe any other hospital system could or would do this. I also do not believe a second hospital would benefit our community.

I encourage you to oppose Quincy Medical Group Hospital, project #20-044.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angela C. Westbrook". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "C".