

Office of the Regional Dean

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Meenakshy Aiyer, MD, MACP
Regional Dean

February 16, 2023

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

RE: US HealthVest and OSF Healthcare System Adult Behavioral Health Hospital
Project: 23-008 Letter of Support

Dear Chairwoman Savage and Members of the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board:

This letter is submitted in support of the proposed adult behavioral health hospital in Peoria.

As the Regional Dean of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria, I know firsthand the challenges our community faces with mental and behavioral health. While there are many health care needs in Illinois, behavioral health care continuously ranks as one of community's top concerns.

Based on public health surveillance data, frequent mental distress, depressive disorders and suicide mortality rates are higher in the Tricounty region (Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford counties) than the US average. Furthermore, in a recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), approximately 24.1% of respondents reported feeling depressed, down, or hopeless more than 3 days in the past month. Similarly, 20.9% of respondents reported that stress and/or anxiety has stopped them from their normal daily activities more than 3 days in the past month and 19.8% reported a mental health condition. In addition, there are significant health inequities related to mental health based on race, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. In a focus group discussion completed in 2021, with over 75 participants from Peoria county revealed that health literacy, access to care and stigma were major barrier to accessing care for behavioral health.

Individuals and families need and deserve access to these critically important services. This hospital will help support some of the current and growing unmet need in Peoria and the surrounding area for inpatient adult psychiatric care, which often results in patients being deferred or even denied necessary mental health treatment. This proposed 100-bed adult hospital will increase access to behavioral health services throughout Central Illinois and bring additional resources to provide inpatient adult behavioral health resources for individuals and families in the region.

I hope you provide this application for US HealthVest and OSF your strong consideration. Approval of this application will increase access to these important services in our area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "meenakshy" in a cursive script. The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Meenakshy Ayer, MD, MACP
Regional Dean
University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria