

30 Winter Street, Suite 1004
Boston, MA 02108

T 617-338-5241
F 617-338-5242
W www.healthlawadvocates.org

Public Testimony of Matt Selig,
Executive Director of Health Law Advocates
Before the Office of the Attorney General and
The Department of Public Health
Regarding the Sale and Conversion of
Caritas Christi Health Care
July 1, 2010

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Good evening, everybody. My name is Matt Selig, and I'm the Executive Director of Health Law Advocates, a public interest, non-profit law firm headquartered in Boston.

First, just a little bit about our organization, if you don't mind. Our mission is to provide pro bono legal services to low-income Massachusetts residents having difficulty accessing or paying for health care. All of our legal services are provided to low-income patients and all of our services are free of charge.

Most of our cases involve patients who are having trouble securing insurance coverage for needed health care services. In these cases, our lawyers partner closely with health care providers, like many of you, to ensure that access to care is secured and claims are paid. We have represented 82 clients from Boston in the past 12 months.

In addition to our individual casework, we engage in legal action that impacts large groups of health care consumers. One example of which we are very proud, a recent example, is that earlier this year we filed a lawsuit, which is ongoing, against the State on behalf of the more than 30,000 legal immigrants whose subsidized health benefits were terminated. We're arguing their benefits should be restored because the action by the State violates their right under the State Constitution to equal protection under the law.

We've also represented the interests of groups of low-income health care consumers in public processes, like this one, where hospital licenses are transferred and non-profit entities converted to for-profit status. As before, our concern in this process is the interest of low-income patients to access quality and affordable health care.

I have attended, along with other staff from Health Law Advocates, the previous five hearings in Brockton, Norwood, Brighton, Fall River and Methuen. We have heard several themes relating to health care access emerging from the testimony from the residents of the six communities, including Dorchester. There is a clear consensus in all of the communities that the Caritas hospitals, including Carney, must continue their charity care and community benefit practices in the long term regardless of whether the Archdiocese of Boston remains involved with the Caritas system.

All of the communities also share the view that it is essential to continue a significant measure of local control of the assets of each hospital. Each affected

community also wants to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, the long-term viability of all the Caritas hospitals. In fact, we haven't heard a single person say that they want fewer community benefits, a minimum of local control and any of the hospitals to close. Health Law Advocates agrees with these principles and will work to make sure that they are affirmed.

In the coming weeks and months we will continue to listen to those living in the affected communities, and as the filings for the applicants are finalized, we will continue to analyze the proposed transaction from the perspective of low-income health care consumers.

We also look forward to a dialogue with Caritas and Cerberus, and once we have the opportunity to review the completed proposal, we will be offering our views and recommendations to the public officials considering these applications.

I want to express HLA's appreciation for the hard work of the Attorney General's Office and her staff, particularly Mr. Spackman, and the Department of Public Health staff, in the public process so far, and particularly in conducting the public hearings. We also thank and commend them for their open door policies to all parties interested in this transaction.

I want to thank the Coalition to Strengthen Carney Hospital for providing health law advocates to work with them. They're a group of health care leaders in the Dorchester community that have been working hard to make sure Carney Hospital thrives.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work that Caritas and Cerberus have put into their application and thank Caritas in particular for their willingness to engage in a dialogue with us. As lawyers, we particularly respect the efforts of the parties' attorneys for the development of this complex proposal.

I would certainly want to thank all the members of the public who are testifying today and at the other hearings for sharing their hopes and concerns regarding this proposal, which will have such a significant impact on thousands of low-income patients.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.