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Public Hearing Comments

Carteret County Inpatient Hospice Bed Adjusted Need Petition

**Presented by Sarah Strange, Executive Board Member
Crystal Coast Hospice House**

Good Afternoon. My name is Sarah Strange and I am on the Executive Board of Crystal Coast Hospice House. I am here today to speak on behalf of our petition for an adjusted need determination to include six hospice inpatient beds in the 2011 State Medical Facilities Plan, to address the current inpatient bed deficit in Carteret County. I am speaking at both the Greenville and Wilmington public hearings because we consider this issue to be of great importance to residents of our county.

Crystal Coast Hospice House was founded in 2008 by a group of compassionate volunteers who recognized the critical need for a hospice inpatient facility in Carteret County. The Crystal Coast Hospice House organization's mission is to give quality end of life care and emotional support to patients and their families residing in Carteret County. With a hospice inpatient facility, and an experienced interdisciplinary team of professionals, Crystal Coast Hospice House envisions providing patient centered, family focused, compassionate care to local residents who have a terminal illness. Our Board of Directors is dedicated to seeking regulatory approval, raising the necessary funds, and increasing public awareness to develop this much-needed facility.

The proposed 2011 SMFP indicates no need determination for hospice inpatient beds in Carteret County. However, the hospice inpatient bed need methodology projects a deficit for five hospice inpatient beds in Carteret County. Even with a projection of a five-bed deficit, the need determination is based on a six-bed deficit threshold for single counties to trigger a need for inpatient beds.

We support the State Health Coordinating Council's methodology in projecting this deficit for hospice beds in Carteret County; however, we believe certain circumstances exist to justify the inclusion of six hospice inpatient beds for Carteret County in the 2011 SMFP, including the following:

- Travel from Carteret County to regional inpatient hospice facilities is disruptive, expensive, and time-consuming, because of Carteret County's unique geography.
- Carteret County's hospice days of care and deaths are increasing at rates that are considerably greater than the State as a whole.
- The population in Carteret County is continuing to both increase and age, with growing need for local hospice inpatient service.
- Community support for hospice inpatient beds in Carteret County is extremely positive.

Geographical Need

Geographic access to hospice inpatient services is particularly important for hospice patients. Family members and friends often visit patients on a daily basis because of the dire conditions that patients are in during the last days of their lives. Travel is disruptive, expensive, and stressful for many families who must travel long distances out of county to visit their loved ones.

Residents of Carteret County have a geographical need for local inpatient hospice services. Carteret County is remote, making up the southernmost portion of the Outer

Banks. Carteret County, bordered on the north by the Pamlico Sound and east and south by the Atlantic Ocean, is defined by water. Many parts of the county are separated from the mainland. The closest interstate and airport are over 30 miles away from Carteret County. With few accessible roads and long stretches of coast, it is difficult for residents to travel easily throughout the county.

Carteret County does not host a hospice inpatient facility. Hospice patients in need of inpatient services must be referred to out-of-county facilities. Travel time for family members visiting their loved ones in out-of-county hospice facilities can be very time consuming, especially while driving from a geographically isolated county. The closest hospice inpatient facility is located in Pitt County and is over an hour and a half away from Morehead City. Furthermore, this facility is over two and a half hours away from Cedar Island, at the far end of Carteret County.

When hospice inpatient services are not accessible to Carteret County residents, patients are often admitted to local hospitals or nursing homes. Neither hospitals nor nursing facilities, which are designed primarily to provide acute or restorative health care, are the most appropriate settings for hospice patients who have opted to forego acute, curative treatments, and who need palliative end-of-life care.

Hospice Utilization

Residents of Carteret County and their physicians recognize the valuable benefits of hospice services. As a result, the utilization of hospice services has grown significantly in Carteret County. According to the proposed 2011 SMFP, Carteret County residents utilize hospice services at a greater rate than many surrounding counties in the region. Furthermore, Carteret County has also experienced significant growth in hospice days of care in recent years. Since 2004, hospice days of care in Carteret County have increased over 294%. By comparison, the State overall has increased 54%. This means the recent growth rate for hospice days of care in Carteret County is almost **four times**

greater than the State average. These are clear indications that hospice is an important and highly utilized service for residents of Carteret County.

Additionally, residents of Carteret County have experienced significant growth in hospice deaths. Over the last six years, the number of total Carteret County deaths served by hospice has increased over 103%.

Population

Much of the growth in hospice days of care and deaths can be attributed to the rapidly aging population in Carteret County. Carteret County has a significantly older population compared to the State and this demographic is projected to increase dramatically in future years. The population age 65 and older makes up one-fourth of the total county population, and is projected to increase 18.9% during the next five years.

Carteret County also has a significantly high cancer incidence rate for the population age 65 and older. According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, cancer diagnoses account for nearly 40% of all hospice admissions. The age 65 and older incidence rate of cancer in Carteret County is 11.4% higher than the State average. Given that cancer is the most common diagnosis for hospice patients, the increased utilization of hospice services for cancer patients makes it important to consider the incidence of this disease in evaluating hospice bed need in Carteret County.

Community Support

Crystal Coast Hospice House recognizes the vast and broad community support for hospice inpatient beds in Carteret County. Crystal Coast Hospice House has received strong support from several hospice agencies to build a hospice inpatient facility within the county. Furthermore, local physicians, government agencies, community leaders,

and local churches have also expressed their support for an inpatient facility. Carteret County residents have identified the great need for local access to inpatient hospice services, and welcome the hospice care that will be provided.

In conclusion, Crystal Coast Hospice House seeks an adjusted need determination for six hospice inpatient beds to provide comprehensive hospice care for terminally ill patients in Carteret County. Local demand for hospice services is increasing at a soaring rate. In addition, the nearest inpatient hospice facility is very far from patients and their families. Without an adjusted need determination, the need for locally accessible hospice inpatient beds in Carteret County will continue to be unmet. Crystal Coast Hospice House and the Carteret County community believe an adjusted need determination will improve access, quality, and costs for Carteret County residents.

We hope you will support our effort by approving this petition for an adjusted need determination. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to discuss this important community issue.