

Graham County Transit

August 10, 2016

T. J. Pulliam, MD, Chair
Long Term Care Committee
c/o Ms. Paige Bennet, Assistant Chief
Healthcare Planning
Division of Health Service Regulation
2704 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2704

RE: Letter in support of an adjusted need determination to be included in the *2017 State Medical Facilities Plan* (SMFP) for a new dialysis facility in Graham County, North Carolina

I am writing this letter to express support for the adjusted need determination proposed to be included in the *2017 State Medical Facilities Plan* (SMFP) for a new dialysis facility in Graham County.

An End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) dialysis facility in Graham County will greatly improve the quality of life for residents suffering from ESRD. The residents of Graham County, North Carolina, and those on extended visits who need dialysis services to stay alive, must travel substantial times and distances to surrounding facilities in Sylva, Murphy, Cherokee, or Waynesville, North Carolina. For example, a resident of Robbinsville, Graham County must travel 74 miles, roundtrip, to the dialysis facility in Cherokee, North Carolina or 68 miles, roundtrip, to the facility in Murphy, North Carolina. These are the two closest facilities.

The long drives are not easy. Distances which appear on maps to be but a few miles involve circuitous routes along roads filled with sharp curves and steep grades. The roads through Graham County run through rugged mountainous country and are extremely dangerous when wet or when snow, ice, and / or foggy conditions are present.

I am the transit director for the county of Graham. When snow falls we are scrambling to see how we can accommodate the need for dialysis either to and/or from safely. If they are on the road we are trying to check road conditions with NCDOT, speak with staff at the dialysis centers on road conditions in their county, seek four wheel drive vehicles to get people home from either EM or the rescue squad. We are encumbered by the dilemma that some are in wheelchairs and we can't offload them to a vehicle that is not equipped with a lift. This past winter we had several serious situations one of those was at Stecoah mountain, it was treacherous they were on their way back from dialysis and several inches of snow fell within a short amount of time. Cherokee dialysis sent them back earlier than usual when they saw that unsafe road conditions were a given. There were many wrecks on that mountain in a matter of minutes. We had the lift equipped dialysis van on the return trip from Cherokee dialysis. We had our driver to wait at the bottom of Stecoah Mountain while we contacted DOT to see if they had a snow plow in the area because the road had become impassable. We were so fortunate there was a truck with snowplow in the area and our transit van followed the snow plow across the mountain safely. They still were spinning and sliding but they made it across without an accident. I was still at the office when the driver returned from offloading ambulatory passengers to four wheel drive vehicles and transporting the ones confined to a wheel chair home.

The driver was shaking he said 'I hope I don't ever go through that again.' I commended him on an excellent job that every dialysis patient was safely home. He stated "yes this time but that road was so dangerous and treacherous, it was very slick, we slipped and slid, then we would spin, it was scary and the riders were afraid. I just don't understand why we can't have a dialysis facility in the county." I didn't have an answer for him do you?

201 West Fort Hill Road
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Graham County Transit

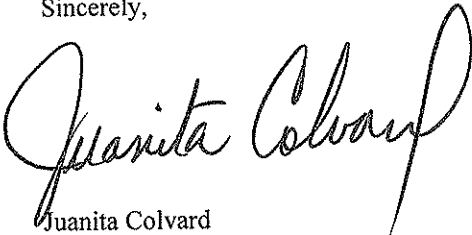
If we had a dialysis facility located in the county we could take them to/or from life sustaining treatment in a much shorter time due to the length of the commute. In the event there were dangerous road conditions we could respond with shortened commute times before the weather made the roads so treacherous.

NCDOT/PTD applied for ARRA (stimulus monies) to equip public transportation vehicles with cameras that have audio. We have these cameras on every van, I've monitored our dialysis transports over the years. It tugs at your heartstrings when you see faces that reflect despair, exhaustion, and the effects from the toll of their illness. It's bad enough to be in a situation where you require life sustaining treatments at a minimum of three times a week but a long commute through winding, steep, curvy roads only adds to the burden even in good weather conditions.

We desperately need a dialysis center in our county due to the lengthy commute times and the dangerous road conditions in inclement weather conditions..

These types of hardships have material and negative impacts on quality of life for both Graham residents who need dialysis services and those who assist them in traveling to the dialysis facilities. This is an excellent proposal for a much needed service. I urge the Division of Health Service Regulation to approve the adjusted need determination.

Sincerely,



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