

Public Hearing Comments

Mecklenburg County Hospice Home Care Office Adjusted Need Petition

Presented by Cristi Keith, Executive Director

Good afternoon. My name is Cristi Keith and I am the Executive Director of Continuum Care Hospice. I am here to speak briefly on behalf of our petition for an adjusted need determination to include one additional hospice home care office for Mecklenburg County in the 2018 State Medical Facilities Plan.

Continuum Care Hospice is a provider of hospice and palliative care. Our mission is to provide the terminally ill patient and their loved ones with the support and care they require to live their lives comfortably. We operate Hospice programs in California and have recently been approved to provide services in Rhode Island.

The Proposed 2018 SMFP indicates no need determination for additional hospice home care offices in Mecklenburg County. However, we believe there is an underserved population in Mecklenburg County that could benefit from an adjusted need determination for one additional hospice home care office in Mecklenburg County, specifically organized to serve African American patients.

We believe that hospice care should be available to any and all persons with an illness for which there is no cure, or for persons who elect not to attempt a cure, resulting in a limited life expectancy. Our petition is directed at one aspect of the racial disparities in health care delivery to the African American community, the underutilization of hospice care by African Americans. If this petition is granted, Continuum would submit a CON application to develop a new hospice agency in Mecklenburg County. If

approved, our services will not only benefit the lives of this target population, but will also decrease the cost of caring for them. Providing quality hospice care for African Americans will improve the quality of end-of-life care, prolong survival rates, while also decreasing the number of high-cost hospital admissions and needless aggressive therapeutic care.

Despite the high quality of hospice care in the United States and North Carolina, there is a significant disparity in hospice utilization by African Americans. Not only do African Americans utilize hospice less than whites, but the number of African Americans utilizing hospice is shrinking. In 2014, only 7.6% of hospice patients were African American, while African Americans constituted 13.2% of the U.S. population.¹

Although the disparity described is prevalent throughout North Carolina, Continuum selected Mecklenburg County for an adjusted need determination petition because there is a greater need for rectifying the disparity in Mecklenburg County than in any other North Carolina county. Mecklenburg County has the largest county population in North Carolina, and also has the largest African American population in North Carolina. The Office of Budget Management projects the population of Mecklenburg County to grow to 1.5 million by 2036, with 33% being African American.

Continuum recognizes there are four existing hospice home care agencies located in Mecklenburg County and that there are a dozen agencies serving Mecklenburg County residents. Yet despite this, there is unequal use of hospice for local residents.

According to Medicare data, hospice utilization among Mecklenburg County residents under-represents the African American population in Mecklenburg County.

Continuum Care Hospice has demonstrated great success in providing access to

¹ NHPCO/US Census Bureau

hospice care in the African American community. In the markets we currently serve, Continuum Care Hospice serves double the number of African Americans than the state average or the other hospices in the area.

In conclusion, Continuum Care Hospice seeks an adjusted need determination for one additional hospice home care office in Mecklenburg County. Our petition is intended to improve local hospice care with regard to access, quality, and value. We have spoken with community residents in Mecklenburg County, and have found strong support from local community leaders to add a hospice home care office specifically organized to serve African American patients. Without an adjusted need determination, the present disparity in hospice utilization will worsen with the growth of the African American population in Mecklenburg County. This lower utilization of hospice and palliative care deprives the local African American population of the benefits of hospice care. It results in lower quality end-of-life care.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to discuss this issue which is important to thousands of residents of the county. We hope you will support our effort to serve Mecklenburg County residents by approving this petition for an adjusted need determination.