

Public Hearing Comments – Healthcare Planning and Certificate of Need Section

Members of the Council, I am here in reference to the proposed adjusted need determination for a new hospice home care office in Mecklenburg County.

My name is Margaret Harris and I have been the Sr. Director of Human Resources & Chief Diversity Officer for the past 14 years. I have had the privilege to witness firsthand the profound impact of our efforts in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) on our delivery of hospice care to the entire community, especially underserved populations.

HR (Human Resources) plays a pivotal role in shaping our organizational culture and practices to ensure that we not only meet but exceed DEI standards. We recognize that providing compassionate hospice care requires understanding and embracing the diverse needs and backgrounds of our community members. Here are a few ways HR contributes to this mission:

- 1. Recruitment:** HR leads our efforts to recruit a diverse team that reflects the communities we serve. We actively seek individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds to join our hospice care team. Through targeted recruitment strategies and inclusive hiring practices, we ensure that our workforce is equipped to provide culturally competent care to the communities we serve. Regarding Mecklenburg County, we align favorably with the African American population. At present, based on the 2021 Vital Statistics for Mecklenburg County, African Americans make up around 32% of the population. At VIA, African Americans are 42.13 % of our direct care staff. When we look at the Direct Care Staff, African Americans make up 25.71% of our RN's; 42.11% LPN's; 77.27% NA's; 25% MD's; 40% SW and 44.44% Chaplains. We have been very intentional about making sure that we can provide the level of culturally competent care our community needs
- 2. Training and Development:** Our training department design programs that promote cultural competence and sensitivity among our staff. This training is administered to both new and existing employees. We provide ongoing education to provide culturally competent healthcare, including understanding the unique end-of-life care needs of diverse and underserved populations. This training not only enhances the skills of our caregivers but also fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels respected and

valued. These programs equip our staff with the knowledge and skills needed to understand and respect the cultural differences between our patients and their families. Topics covered include cultural awareness, communication styles, religious and spiritual beliefs, and end-of-life traditions. Continuous training ensures that our staff remains sensitive and responsive to the evolving needs of our diverse patient population.

3. **Policy Development:** HR works closely with leadership to develop policies that promote equity and inclusivity across our organization. This includes policies related to language access, accommodation for cultural practices, and equitable access to care resources. By embedding DEI principles into our policies and procedures, we create a supportive environment where both our staff and the community can thrive.
4. **Continuous Improvement:** DEI is not a static goal at VIA Health Partners, but an ongoing commitment. HR continuously monitors our DEI initiatives' effectiveness through data collection and feedback mechanisms. We regularly collect feedback from patients, families, staff, and volunteers to assess the effectiveness of our programs and identify areas for improvement. This feedback loop allows us to adapt and enhance our practices, ensuring we remain responsive to the needs of our diverse community.
5. Finally, The HR department's commitment to cultural competency is integral to our mission of providing high-quality hospice care to all individuals, regardless of their background. By fostering a diverse workforce, providing ongoing education, developing inclusive policies, engaging with the community, supporting our staff, and continuously improving our practices, HR ensures that we deliver compassionate and culturally sensitive care to every patient and family we serve, including those from underserved populations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important matter. I am proud of the work we have done for many years, and the work we will continue for many years to come. I am confident that our efforts in cultural competency are making a meaningful difference in the lives of our patients and their families.