



February 19, 2024

Brian W. Frazee
President & CEO

The Honorable Trey Paradee
Chair
Joint Finance Committee
411 Legislative Ave.
Dover, DE 19901

The Honorable Kimberly Williams
Vice-Chair
Joint Finance Committee
411 Legislative Ave
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Chair Paradee and Vice-Chair Williams,

Nemours Children's
Health
Mark Marcantano, JD
Regional President,
Nemours Children's
Delaware Valley

Bayhealth
Terry Murphy,
President & CEO

Beebe Healthcare
David A. Tam,
MD, MBA,
President & CEO

ChristianaCare
Janice E. Nevin,
MD, MPH
President & CEO

TidalHealth Nanticoke
Penny Short, MSM, BSN,
RN
President & CEO

Saint Francis Hospital
James Woodward
President, & CEO
Trinity Health Mid-
Atlantic Region

Delaware Healthcare
Association
Brian W. Frazee
President & CEO

On behalf of the Delaware Healthcare Association (DHA), which represents Delaware's hospitals, health systems, and health related organizations, thank you for the opportunity to comment on Governor Carney's FY 2025 DHSS budget. DHA's 2024 advocacy priorities are strengthening Delaware's healthcare workforce, ensuring access to care, and advancing health equity. These priorities highlight Delaware's biggest healthcare challenges. Governor Carney has included needed investments to advance this work in his FY 2025 budget proposal. We respectfully request that the Joint Finance Committee maintain and include additional investments that will help to enable every Delawarean to achieve optimal health.

Strengthening the healthcare workforce is critical to our state. Delaware's population is growing rapidly and is aging — Delaware is the 5th oldest state in the nation. These factors will continue to increase demands on the state's healthcare infrastructure. At the same time, Delaware faces a healthcare workforce shortage. The First State's hospitals are doing everything possible to recruit and retain doctors, nurses, and other providers. DHA is also working collaboratively on strategies to support today's workforce while also developing a future pipeline of healthcare professionals to meet Delaware's evolving care needs in the future.

- One of these important collaborations is **\$1.25 million included in the Governor's recommended budget to expand Delaware Tech's nursing program** to increase the number of nursing students here in Delaware. DHA supports this key initiative and urges the Joint Finance Committee to maintain these funds in the final FY 25 budget.

A strong health care workforce is necessary to ensuring access to care, another DHA priority. Access to care is about making sure everyone in our state can get the care they need when they need it. Delaware hospitals are committed to providing high-quality care to everyone they serve. In the absence of a government-run hospital, Delaware's nonprofit hospitals serve as a much-needed safety net, treating all patients who enter their doors regardless of ability to pay. They provide access to care in their communities through primary care, school-based health centers, mobile health units, and more. Unfortunately, skyrocketing labor, medical supply, and drug expenses have resulted in historic financial challenges that are putting nonprofit hospital missions of service at risk. DHA is supporting policies that enhance access to care in innovative ways that meet today's unique challenges.

- One way to ensure access to care is to improve transitions of care within the healthcare system. Delaware hospitals have over 300 long-stay patients in hospital beds that no longer need to be in an acute medical facility. The longest patient has been in the hospital for over

two years. Long-stay patients miss out on the specialized care or level of exercise or activities that they would have in a more appropriate care setting. They also occupy beds that could be used for those in need of acute hospital care and contribute to longer emergency department wait times and higher health care costs. Unfortunately, barriers exist that prevent these patients from transitioning home or to a more appropriate care setting. **We urge the Joint Finance Committee to allocate funding to support solutions currently being developed by the SCR 64 Non-Acute Long-Stay Patient Task Force led by Senator Nicole Poore and Representative Kerri Evelyn Harris.**

Finally, advancing health equity is a top priority. Hospitals play a vital role in ensuring equitable access to care for all Delawareans. DHA is launching a new Health Equity Council in 2024 to help inform the internal and external policies that will reduce healthcare disparities and promote health equity in Delaware. DHA will lead and support initiatives that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within Delaware's healthcare systems and beyond. Some of these initiatives include providing health coverage to populations without access to such coverage.

- We support **House Bill 150, the Cover All Delaware Children Act** sponsored by Representative Krista Griffith that seeks to provide medical coverage for Delaware children who are not otherwise covered, including the undocumented. The bill would also leverage federal dollars to cover prenatal, delivery and postpartum care for undocumented pregnant people. Providing health coverage for preventative care will ensure these babies can grow to be as healthy as possible, leading to cost savings well into the future.
- Providing statewide **health coverage for outpatient dialysis care for those without access to such coverage**, including the undocumented population would yield significant saving to the state while saving lives. Emergency-only dialysis is more costly and has a 14-fold higher mortality rate than the standard three times per week hemodialysis treatment. Twenty states (including Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia) and DC provide coverage for statewide outpatient hemodialysis to the undocumented population. Delaware does not currently provide such coverage.

We request that the Joint Finance Committee prioritize these health equity initiatives that improve the health of our neighbors while also reducing unnecessary emergency department utilization, leading to lower health care costs.

DHA looks forward to working collaboratively with Governor Carney and the Delaware General Assembly to strengthen the healthcare workforce, ensure access to care, and advance health equity to achieve a healthier Delaware.

Sincerely,



Brian Frazee
President & CEO
Delaware Healthcare Association

CC: Members of the Joint Finance Committee