

Dear Chairman Kilgore:

As an Emergency Department physician, I am used to things moving and changing very quickly. The economics of health care is no exception. I am also used to being flexible and adapting to that change. Our local healthcare systems must do the same if they are to continue to serve our communities. We must adapt to the ever-changing financial and regulatory pressures being placed on our industry.

The merger of Wellmont Health System and Mountain States Health Alliance is a creative local solution to a very real local problem. Our region has realized severe economic challenges and loss of jobs. Those challenges along with the pressures hospitals face from sequestration and Medicare cuts, as well as inpatient volume declines, directly impact our ability to maintain viable hospitals. I don't see these forces suddenly disappearing for our communities. This merger will allow two systems who spend significant amounts of money competing with one another to streamline those dollars and reinvest them back into our community to better care for our patients. Our resources stay in our communities.

This merger will also ensure that decisions about our local community hospitals and the patients we care for will be made by local people with a passion for our region. Without this merger, I am fearful that both systems would be forced to explore options to partner with other larger systems outside our area or even our state. Should that happen, the partnerships MSHA and Wellmont could form with outside systems would almost certainly lead to higher prices with no guarantees of better quality and outcomes. Furthermore, many of our local resources would flow to offices outside our regions for decisions about their deployment by well-intentioned executives who unfortunately aren't from our communities.

The Cooperative Agreement that Wellmont Health System and Mountain States Health Alliance have proposed entering into with the Commonwealth of Virginia ensures accountability, maintains enforceable commitments on pricing, and will keep hundreds of millions of dollars in our region to improve health. I urge you to approve this merger as I believe it is a local solution to the problems our communities must face in the healthcare sector.

Sincerely,

Brian C. Dawson, MD MBA FACEP

Community Member, Practicing Emergency Medicine Physician