

Dear Chairman Kilgore:

I have been an emergency department physician in a rural hospital for 35 years. I am very concerned about the issues I see facing our small, community hospital. With the financial pressures of federal cuts, decreasing inpatient volumes, and a declining economy in Southwest Virginia, the future of Russell County Medical Center could be in jeopardy. However, the proposed merger of Mountain States Health Alliance and Wellmont Health System gives me hope that we have found an innovative, local solution to address some of our challenges.

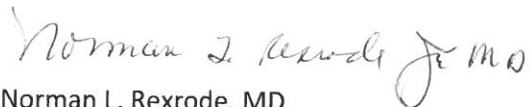
One of our most significant challenges is addressing the growing substance abuse and addiction crisis. With the downturn in our economy, so many turn to drugs and alcohol. We have very limited resources for these patients to turn to. As a part of the proposed merger, both Wellmont and MSHA have committed to investing hundreds of millions of dollars in residential and outpatient addiction recovery services, tobacco and substance abuse prevention programs, and community based mental health services. These are life changing services that will give our region new hope.

In addition, we have learned in SWVA that we are more successful when we grow our own physicians. Physician recruitment to our rural area is such a challenge. This merger proposes to grow academic and research opportunities, continue to enhance our graduate medical education programs and post-graduate health care training, ensuring we have quality providers caring for our patients in every corner of Southwest Virginia.

Finally, I am encouraged about the holistic approach this integrated health care system will take to caring for the people of our region. Healthcare is changing and we have to change with it. We are no longer incentivized to hospitalize patients; we are challenged to care for them, mind, body and spirit, in a way that prevents chronic disease and better manages their overall health. This focus on population health can dramatically change not just the health of our region for the good, but the economics of our region. A healthier population is a more successful population.

I strongly encourage you to approve this innovative, local solution and allow us to move forward to improve the health of our patients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Norman L. Rexrode, MD". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Norman L. Rexrode, MD