

September 28, 2016

Southwest Virginia Health Authority
851 French Moore Jr. Blvd., Suite 178
Abingdon, VA 24210

Dear health authority members:

I write this letter to support the proposed cooperative agreement for the merger of Wellmont Health System and Mountain States Health Alliance because it will strengthen a program near and dear to me.

I returned to Southwest Virginia earlier this year to establish a family medicine practice with Wellmont Medical Associates and to serve as director of Wellmont's osteopathic family medicine residency program, which is based in Southwest Virginia. This is a return to my medical roots because I was one of the program's first graduates. I received outstanding training through this residency, as I learned from many physicians who have provided exceptional care in Virginia and Tennessee for decades.

In examining the proposed merger, I am excited because of the potential to provide additional training sites for our medical residents. By coming together, we will be able to keep these residents in our region for even more of their rotations.

For example, we now send residents to Charleston, West Virginia, to complete a pediatric rotation, but with the proposed merger, we would be able to add Niswonger Children's Hospital in Johnson City as a site. That is important not only because it reduces travel time but also because it further exposes our residents to the health care issues prevalent in Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee.

A merger would also open our residency program to additional locations for training at tertiary and community hospitals. Currently, our residents are able to work in a clinic in Norton, Wellmont's two community hospitals in Virginia (Lonesome Pine Hospital and Mountain View Regional Medical Center) and the health system's tertiary hospitals (Holston Valley Medical Center and Bristol Regional Medical Center).

By adding additional medical facilities to the mix, our residents would be able to receive training from even more physicians, accelerating their knowledge and allowing them to work with even more specialty physicians. This would clearly align with one of the goals of the COPA application – to enhance the preparation of health professionals and lead to more physicians choosing our region to practice medicine.

Thank you for your consideration of this important application. I urge you to support it.

Sincerely,



Derek Harman, DO
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