



Hospital Sisters HEALTH SYSTEM

Hospital Sisters Health System Division-Eastern Wisconsin

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- St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center
Green Bay, WI
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- Sacred Heart Hospital
Eau Claire, WI
- St. Joseph's Hospital
Chippewa Falls, WI

June 7, 2011

Governor Scott Walker
Office of the Governor of Wisconsin
115 East Capitol
Madison WI 53702

RE: Devastating Healthcare Consequences of \$32M BCCB Grant Elimination in UW System Budget Bill

Dear Governor Walker:

As you may know, the Chippewa Valley is one of five Wisconsin demonstration communities sharing in two federal Building Community Capacity through Broadband (BCCB) grants totaling \$32.3 million to improve high-capacity Internet access and use. We are writing because on June 4, 2011, the Joint Finance Committee finished its work on your UW System Budget Bill and added provisions 23 thru 26 to terminate Wisconsin's BCCB. If enacted, they will:

- 1. Return \$32M in Wisconsin grant funds to the federal government and tear down the BCCB broadband project (awarded in August 2010).** This will harm 39 Wisconsin communities and 182 institutions (including rural and underserved critical access hospitals and clinics), along with libraries and schools statewide. Ironically, sending these funds back to Washington, DC, terminates 483 Wisconsin jobs created by BCCB, and Washington may send the funds to another state.
- 2. Cancel over \$3.1 million in additional matching funds** by other hospitals and clinics, city and county municipalities, technical colleges, schools and universities—funds invested to bring down costs.
- 3. Destroy a vital Care Integration broadband connection that would be created between our hospitals** in eastern (Green Bay, Sheboygan) and western Wisconsin (Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls). Made possible by matching funds of many stakeholders including schools, counties, hospitals, and the University of Wisconsin, this connection links multiple rural and urban hospitals and clinics and allows them to closely integrate and share costs and technology resources at price points that do not exist in the current commercial market and industry.
- 4. Preclude any future broadband grants or partnerships with the University of Wisconsin** (Board of Regents, System, Extension) and UW Health. Without UW as a catalyst for new broadband networking approaches to deliver advanced and low cost broadband networks, many technology based collaborations are not technically or financially possible.

Whatever the purpose of these provisions, they have devastating unintended consequences to healthcare in Wisconsin because they will inevitably result in substantially higher costs and less services, particularly in rural and other underserved areas. Broadband is a critical healthcare infrastructure that reduces costs, improves patient outcomes, and expands quality and accessibility for patients. Buried broadband fiber and wireless towers are also mission critical to EMS, fire, police and public safety services and disaster preparedness.

BCCB expands high-capacity broadband communication and provides a networking infrastructure that expands capacity to improve access to life-saving treatment for patients in underserved areas. Small rural hospitals benefit from the leveraged



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investments of larger regional hospitals because technological capabilities and applications may be shared over long distances using advanced networks. These collaborations and economies of scale, made possible by the University of Wisconsin-Extension, help hospitals bend the healthcare cost curve down.

Many telemedicine and critical life-saving health care applications today cannot work on anything less than ultra high-speed broadband. BCCB saves lives by improving public safety, EMS and health care service delivery and enabling the high-speed exchange of critical emergency medical information. In many areas of Wisconsin, the necessary broadband speed is unavailable at any price. In other areas, a slower speed is commercially available, but only at a prohibitive price. In an era of state and federal health care funding cuts, hospitals and clinics need to share applications using their own redundant and reliable community area networks. Sharing applications reduces costs for patients and for taxpayers.

Currently, Wisconsin ranks 43rd in the United States in broadband access (www.broadbandmap.gov). This dismal ranking describes a lack of connectivity that is a significant impediment to providing health care that is high quality and accessible. The health care impact of this digital exclusion—felt particularly in rural areas and small towns—means that care may be delayed, shortages of medical professionals may increase, telemedicine may remain inaccessible, broadband may devour an ever-greater portion of hospital and clinic budget, and it may be unreliable or remain unavailable.

For example, reliable high-speed internet access is necessary to transmit large digital MRI or CT scans, or other diagnostic data, to enable an on-call radiologist to provide coverage for multiple hospitals over a wide geographic area. Without this connectivity, hospitals and clinics would either lack 24/7 radiology coverage, would pay a premium for an onsite radiologist, or share a local radiologist and endure response time delays. With critically ill or traumatically injured patients, delays caused by response times or slow broadband speeds could cost lives, result in preventable disability, result in unnecessary patient transports and duplicative tests and further drive up costs. (Please see the enclosed Radiology Hub Case Study that provides an example of what BCCB could do for underserved rural communities.)

Hospital Sisters Health System opposes inclusion of Sections 23 thru 26 in the UW System Budget Bill. As this Joint Finance Committee legislation heads to the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate for debate and a vote, we respectfully ask for your leadership in removing Sections 23-26 (or striking out the provisions before signing the bill). They will negatively impact Wisconsin hospitals (including many rural and critical access hospitals and clinics) and the care they provide to patients.

For further information and background on our request, or our Teleradiology Hub Case Study, we invite you to contact us or Mr. David Fish, Senior Advisor: Government Relations and Advocacy, Hospital Sisters Health System at (715) 577-8265. It would also be our pleasure to host you for a visit of any of our facilities.

Sincerely,

Stephen Ronstrom, President and CEO
HSHS Division (Western Wisconsin)

Heidi J. Selberg, Vice President of Strategy and Advocacy
HSHS Division (Eastern Wisconsin)

Cc: Radiology Hub Case Study