



March 19th, 2024

Professional Distinction

Personal Dignity

Patient Advocacy

Hennepin County Commissioners
Hennepin County Government Center
Room 300
South 6th St.
Minneapolis, MN 55487

Dear Commissioners,

Over the last seven months, nurses and other direct healthcare staff at Hennepin Healthcare Systems (HHS) came to you with deep concerns about the future of the hospital. In your November meeting, you created systems of reports and review. As nurses, we create care plans. Our care plan for the hospital board and CEO included numerous interventions to improve conditions for both workers and patients at HHS. Despite our attempts at communications through email actions, direct conversations, public comment at Hennepin County Commissioner meetings, a petition of no confidence in our CEO, and a meeting with HHS board members, there has been no evidence of learning or desire to make any demonstrable changes. We remain concerned about the future of HHS.

One month ago, the HHS MNA Co-Chairs met with 4 members of the HHS Board including Babette, Brock, Kyle, and Commissioner Fernando. MNA requested this meeting to discuss the concerns we had been voicing over the previous several months. During the meeting we presented the concerns nurses and many other HHS employees had brought forward including the significant cuts to our health insurance plans, workplace violence concerns, overuse of agency staff over recruiting or retention efforts, and the overall lack of transparency within the organization. Unfortunately, this meeting did not go well. While MNA co-chair Janell spoke, she was interrupted by one of the HHS Board members who both raised his voice and shook his finger at her as if she was not an equal in the room.

The behavior demonstrated by this HHS Board member was unprofessional, inappropriate, and degrading. Even worse was how this HHS Board member was openly combative towards Chair Irene Fernando, he spoke about her as if she wasn't sitting in the room. We find this even more concerning as Chair Fernando is a woman of color, the first woman of color to be elected as Hennepin County Board Chair in its entire history. While not acknowledging that she was even in the room, he was loudly exclaiming how the Hennepin County Commissioners all have ulterior motives and agendas and do not truly care for HHS the way the HHS Board members apparently do. The behavior was shocking, the MNA chairs were speechless as we were not expecting to receive an eruptive scolding. We were exasperated by the lack of response from the other two HHS Board members as if this behavior was to be expected and tolerated. We did not find this acceptable; this behavior should

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not be tolerated from someone who has decision making capabilities for this organization as he did not represent the morals and values of HHS in the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, we expressed our desire to collaborate with the HHS Board and explained our ongoing issues with accessibility to HHS Board meeting schedules, minutes or contact information for board members. While Board Chair Babette did state she hoped this would be a first step in developing a relationship, she reminded us that the HHS board wasn't the place to bring the concerns we had. We are unsure how the concerns we raised were irrelevant to the overall function and oversight of HHS. We now believe the HHS board members agreed to meet to pacify us rather than to develop a productive working relationship. This is evidenced by the lack of any additional communication or response from the board since we met a month ago.

Nothing has improved at the hospital. We continue to lose nurses every month- last week there were 119 open RN positions. Nurses have even less faith the new hospital board is willing to make the needed changes.

We still have the following questions, many of which we sent last fall:

1. How did the health plan audit reflect the lived reality of those who experienced the changes? It's our understanding that there were no interviews with workers, the unions were not contacted, and data along is not going to demonstrate the impacts of these harmful cuts.
2. Where did the second half of the \$8 million that was allocated to the health plans go? Where is the accountability for taxpayer money and how is this money being used to retain workers who are now leaving or considering leaving due to the myriad of issues and lack of financial viability in their positions?
3. How do the cuts in benefits promote the mission of HHS and Hennepin County, as well as improve retention and recruitment?
4. What is the commitment from commissioners to HHS, where they care for citizens of Hennepin County as well as anyone else seeking care and the workers who continue to bear the brunt of business decisions that cause harm?
5. What is HHS doing to improve staffing ratios knowing that 10% of all adverse events in the state happened at HHS, a subsidiary of Hennepin County, and are directly related to staffing?
6. Who was informed of these benefit plan changes and when? Who approved of the benefit changes and when? What details were released to whom and when?
7. How are employees who see drastic cuts in their health insurance benefits able to make informed decisions for how to provide for their families without having full access to the benefit changes well before open enrollment begins?
8. Knowing that wages and incentives are often lower for healthcare workers who choose to work at HCMC compared to private employers,

- what work is HHS doing to ensure worker retention is a main and meaningful goal for management at HHS?
9. Why did management choose to remove premium pay for nurses and other healthcare professionals who volunteer to pick up additional shifts and instead move toward an “on-demand/gig work” model? In the meantime, staffing continues to be at low levels, leading to increased work for healthcare staff which is creating additional issues within the organization.
 10. Where was the federal money that was passed through the state legislature spent in 2020 until now? We would like to see a detailed budget of how and where that money was spent.
 11. What are you doing as Hennepin County Commissioner to ensure that decisions made by HCMC management reflect the mission of HHS, work to retain healthcare workers, improve patient care, and reduce adverse events?
 12. Why did the hospital board determine that the first piece of business that needed to be addressed was raising the CEO’s compensation when it was clear that business should have been reviewed by the county board first? What accountability is there when the hospital board chose to move forward with this vote and approval even though DeCubellis declined to accept it.

At this point, there has been no meaningful response, change, or work. The health system’s condition is only going to further degrade and it’s time for intervention before it codes.

Commissioners, we call on you to initiate the dissolution of the Hennepin Healthcare Systems Board of Directors and to hold hospital leadership accountable for their actions, which are eroding the foundation of our esteemed public institution.

Please reach out to us at hcmcofficers@mnnurses.org if you have any questions or need additional information.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Janell Johnson Thiele and Jeremy Olson-Ehlert
HCMC MNA Chairs