

Sonja Rajki, Esq.
Senior Vice President & Co-General Counsel
The MetroHealth System
H.B. 110, State Operating Budget - Public Testimony
Senate Finance Committee

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee - thank you for providing The MetroHealth System the opportunity to provide testimony during the local government day for H.B. 110. I am here today to discuss an issue related to public hospitals, such as MetroHealth, and clarifying language regarding our ability to partner with nonprofit organizations.

The MetroHealth System is the safety-net health system for Cuyahoga County, caring for the most underserved members of our community. MetroHealth's more than 7,800 employees provide care at four hospitals, four emergency departments, more than 20 health centers and 40 additional sites throughout Northeast Ohio. In the past year, MetroHealth has served 300,000 patients at more than 1.4 million visits. Seventy-five percent of our patients are uninsured or covered by Medicare or Medicaid. MetroHealth is a county hospital, and as of today, there are only five county hospitals, and four joint township district hospitals left in Ohio. Public hospitals play a vital role in the overall delivery of essential health care services in our State.

We are seeking an amendment to HB 110, which contains the language of House Bill 222. This bill passed out of the House of Representatives on May 6th unanimously, by a vote of 96-0. The amendment language seeks to provide clarity to an already codified section of the Ohio Revised Code, sections 339.10 and 513.172.

In the last General Assembly, in the Operating Budget, House Bill 166, the Legislature included language that helped ensure that our state's joint township district and county hospitals remain economically viable and can best meet the needs of the communities in which they provide health care services. This change authorizes these hospitals to partner with or create nonprofit entities to advance their mission. When the code sections that created County and Joint Township Districts Hospitals was originally drafted in the 1950's, the delivery of healthcare was far different than it is today. The revision to the statute provided a clear pathway for these hospitals to partner with other entities, something that all other hospitals in the state can already do.

This language from HB 166 allows our hospitals to collaborate with nonprofit organizations to better achieve efficiencies and scale or provide new services where they don't exist today. For example, this law change allowed us to partner with community behavioral health and addiction service providers to meet the needs of our patients for these important services.

The amendment being sought in HB 110 by county and joint township district hospitals further clarifies an unintended ambiguity in the current law, by stating that a nonprofit entity formed by a county or joint township district hospital is a separate entity from the public hospital. This legislation does not provide any new authority to these hospitals, but clarifies that any nonprofit formed or collaborating with a county or joint district hospital is a distinct entity for all purposes and not a division, agency or department of the public hospital. This change will provide potential partners with certainty that the relationship is with the nonprofit entity, and not the public county or joint township district hospital.

House Bill 222 has been referred to the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, Chaired by the Vice Chair of this Committee, Senator Gavarone and is awaiting Sponsor Testimony. We are requesting this language be included as an amendment to House Bill 110, the State's Operating Budget, because House Bill 222 and the corresponding amendment simply clarify existing law that was enacted in the previous General Assembly. Including this amendment in the Operating Budget will help expedite the clarification process – which will, in turn, assist county and joint township district hospitals in meeting their mission.

As I previously stated, HB 222 passed unanimously out of the House of Representatives, and has the support of the other county and joint township district hospitals. During the House Committee process, in addition to MetroHealth, this bill received proponent written testimony from: Hocking Valley Community Hospital, Highland District Hospital, Wyandot Memorial Hospital, Hicksville Community Memorial Hospital, and Paulding Community Hospital. We respectfully request that the amendment to HB 110 containing the language of HB 222 be included in the bill.

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony today and I welcome any questions. Thank you.



About The MetroHealth System

The MetroHealth System is redefining health care by going beyond medical treatment to improve the foundations of community health and well-being: affordable housing, a cleaner environment, economic opportunity and access to fresh food, convenient transportation, legal help and other services. The system strives to become as good at preventing disease as it is at treating it.

The system's more than 600 doctors, 1,700 nurses and 7,800 employees go to work each day with a mission of service, to their patients and to the community. As Cuyahoga County's safety net health system, MetroHealth plays an essential role in the region, caring for anyone and everyone, regardless of an ability to pay.

Founded in 1837, MetroHealth operates four hospitals, four emergency departments and more than 20 health centers and 40 additional sites throughout Cuyahoga County. The system serves more than 300,000 patients, two-thirds of whom are uninsured or covered by Medicare or Medicaid.

MetroHealth is home to Cuyahoga County's most experienced Level I Adult Trauma Center, verified since 1992, and Ohio's only adult and pediatric trauma and burn center.

As an academic medical center, MetroHealth is committed to research and to teaching and training tomorrow's caregivers. Each active staff physician holds a faculty appointment at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Its main campus hospital houses the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Lincoln-West School of Science & Health, the only high school in America located inside a hospital.

Knowing that good health is about much more than good medical care, MetroHealth has launched the Institute for H.O.P.E.[™] (Health, Opportunity, Partnership, Empowerment), which uses a coordinated, collaborative and strategic approach to help patients with non-medical needs such as healthy food, stable housing and job training.