NORTH VALLEY
HOSPITAL

PLANETREE-patient centered care in a healing environment

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Montana Senate
Testimony before the Judiciary Committee on HB 362

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Maura Fields. I am a registered nurse and am currently employed as the Chief Clinical Officer at North Valley Hospital in Whitefish, Montana. I have worked at North Valley Hospital for 25 years and have been an RN for 34 years.

I come to you today as a representative of a community of health care providers at a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital in Northwest Montana to speak in favor of HB 362.

HB 362 would provide protection from civil litigation for licensed health care providers in the event that resources are limited and they have to perform clinical triage and care services under the model of disaster medicine.

From a hospital and clinical administrator's perspective, these exceptional circumstances, whether a disaster or unfolding pandemic could overwhelm and diminish the ability of the hospital to provide care. By example, we may not have enough beds for patients who come to the hospital for care, or not enough ventilators for patients who could benefit from them, or not enough staff to diagnose and administer needed treatments.

In these exceptional circumstances it means that it would be impossible for hospitals and other health care facilities to perform under their "normal" operational standards. Yet these same individuals may be held to those very standards of care without the explicit protection that is proposed in HB 362.

As a clinical administrator, I have a duty to secure and allocate resources in a time of catastrophic disruption. I believe it is our duty and responsibility to be proactive in preparing for these possibilities. Montanans, as represented by their legislators, need to continue to support planning for these exceptional circumstances. As noted in the American Nurse's Association document on Adapting Standards of Care Under Extreme Conditions, "Society has a duty to support those taking extraordinary measures for the public good."

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Implicit in this bill is the opportunity and invitation for Montana's health care community to come together to develop disaster medicine protocols. It also follows that the development of disaster medicine protocols will build stronger networks among critical access hospitals and larger regional hospitals.

To that end, HB 362 will help ensure that a licensed health care provider will be protected from civil liability while performing their health care duties under the protocols of disaster medicine in the event that patient care needs exceed normal medical protocols.

I urge your support of HB 362. Thank you.

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