

June 30, 2020

Testimony of Julian Craig, MD Past President and Current Board Member
Medical Society of the District of Columbia

Dear Chairs Gray and McDuffie;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before your committees today as you consider two major healthcare projects for the District. My name is Julian Craig and I am testifying today on behalf of the Medical Society of DC, where I serve as a Director and have served as a past president. I also speak today as a physician who has practiced for 20 years in Ward 8, and have long advocated for the residents of Ward 7 and 8.

The United Medical Center, or Greater Southeast Community Hospital as many of my patients still call it, has been in financial turmoil for two decades. There are many physicians who have been there before me and many who have come on board after me that continue to work hard to keep the doors open. We have been waiting for a solution to this problem for a long time.

The Medical Society supports a new hospital being built at the St. Elizabeth's campus. A modern hospital built with a local partner and reputable healthcare system is the best-case scenario for a new community hospital. I applaud this effort, and thank you Chairman Gray, for your leadership and dedication to building a new hospital in Ward 8. We also commend the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Wayne Turnage for their work to make this vision a reality.

However, none of us can support a new hospital, watch it be built, and declare victory over health inequality "East of the River". In reality, truly equitable healthcare requires a world class hospital AND a healthcare system composed of diverse, local healthcare options. A hospital in Ward 8 needs the support of local physicians AND local mental health providers AND federally qualified health centers to supplement the quality of care that the healthcare system will provide.

Wards 7 and 8 have numerous physicians and independent practices that have dedicated their careers to serving the residents of the District. These physicians work every day to ensure the health of the community and provide cultural representation which their patients have come to understand and appreciate. Many of these physicians currently serve at United Medical Center on the campus in its Physician Office Building. When the new hospital opens, what becomes of these physicians? UHS and George Washington have world class physicians – something the Medical Society knows very well – but their work must be supplemented with the local practices and physicians that have been treating residents and their families for years.

According to a study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), Washington DC has the most intense gentrification in the United States of America¹. Between 2000 and 2013, 20,000 black DC residents were displaced from their communities. Rising taxes, property values and rent not only affect these District residents, but also the independent physician practices that have been taking care of

¹ NCRC Shifting Neighborhoods-March 19, 2019
ncrc.org/gentrification/

them. Gentrification is different from displacement, but it is a direct cause of it. For the new hospital to be successful, displacement does not have to occur.

As you discuss this hospital contract, there are ways the District government, the City Council, and UHS can ensure that there is a vibrant, diverse, equitable healthcare network to serve our most in-need residents:

- For those physician practices that want to affiliate with or support the hospital, UHS and the District should ensure space in the new Medical Office Buildings that are being built, and have a preferential rental agreement for these affiliated practices.
- UHS should offer preferential hiring to local physicians who want to work for UHS and GW.
- The District should ensure that any practice or physician that wants to maintain an independent practice in Wards 7 and 8, can create a financially viable practice. Last month MSDC shared just how the District can do this – tax relief for building or purchasing office space, grants or loan programs for local practices, increased Medicaid reimbursement, and student loan forgiveness programs to ensure graduating physicians can takeover or establish local practices already established in the District.

Finally, the Medical Society wants to thank all the council members, those present and past, for the attention that has been given to UMC and Greater Southeast Community Hospital over the years. As always, MSDC looks forward to working with you to make the District the best place to practice medicine.

Sincerely,
Julian Craig, MD