

CSEA TESTIFIES AT HEARING

The following is the testimony of CSEA Long Island Region President Nick LaMorte at the recent Assembly hearing on the Berger Hospitals Report.

Good morning. I am Nicholas LaMorte, President of CSEA, Long Island Region, representing some 50,000 active public and private employees in Nassau and Suffolk.

In addition to the workers in municipalities, school districts and libraries in our area, CSEA also represents thousands of direct care employees in public hospitals like Stony Brook University Medical Center and Nassau University Medical Center.

I am here today to express our outrage with regard to the Final Report of the Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century, sometimes referred to as the Berger report.

Our bottom line is this - The legislature must reject this report in its entirety. And this should be done right away.

CSEA's primary concerns center around the recommendations to give Stony Brook University Medical Center the ***“operational and governance freedom” to enter into so-called meaningful partnerships***; And the report also urges that a ***study be conducted with an eye toward privatizing Stony Brook University Medical Center.***

CSEA is adamantly opposed to both these moves, as the “operational and governance freedom” referred to in the Berger report, would actually hasten the privatization of this hospital.

1. Stony Brook University Medical Center is the only public hospital in Suffolk County. That means it has a very special mission, to provide quality care to everyone without regard to the ability to pay.

2. If Stony Brook is privatized, it would not get the benefit of a better reimbursement from both the state and the federal government. As a private facility it would then be driven by the **concern for profits over patients.**

3. Stony Brook has the only level 1 trauma center in Suffolk County, with the ability to serve and treat the most seriously injured patients. Trauma centers are the first line of defense in response to mass casualty incidents, natural disasters and public health crises.

The report fails to consider the workforce, except as abstract numbers. It's as if the workers were considered merely expensive widgets. But they aren't.

Many of the workers at Stony Brook are taxpaying homeowners, Mothers and Fathers with children to feed; They are public employees who provide essential services to you, your families and your neighbors. In turn, they receive fair pay and reasonable benefits, which allows them to support their families and area businesses, injecting revenue into the state, town and county coffers.

The public employees who work at Stony Brook University Medical Center are the bedrock of this community. **Make no mistake; privatizing their jobs is an attack on these decent, hard-working employees.**

One of the biggest myths used to justify the move toward privatization is this:
“Workers in private industry are more motivated than public employees.”

The fact is – many private companies offer poor quality at rock bottom prices by paying very low wages, often by denying benefits. This does NOT increase morale or employee loyalty. Privatization results in high turnover, inadequate training and generally poor performance.

The truth is this:

Public employees at Stony Brook University Medical Center actually save the public money.

CSEA has been fighting increasing tendency for hospital management to contract out the work traditionally done by public employees to private companies. The result is – hospital management has been throwing away taxpayer money for construction projects at University Hospital for some time.

The state is always claiming it doesn't have any money, but it's not properly using its greatest resource - the people who already work here.

Point in fact: University Hospital already has a crew of highly qualified carpenters, plumbers and electricians who can handle projects in-house, saving the state over \$2 million dollars a year.

Here are just two ways in which our public employee workforce could have saved the hospital money last year alone:

During a recent project at the hospital blood bank, using outside contractors cost the state \$954,974.40

But if they had used in-house CSEA workers, they could have saved more than \$442-thousand dollars.

Another project at the hospital pharmacy, using outside contractors cost the state \$1,863,137 dollars. **But if they had used in-house CSEA workers, they could have saved \$918-thousand dollars.**

It doesn't make any sense to allow overpaid outside contract workers to steal your tax dollars, but that's just what the hospital has been doing. So if you want to save money, going outside to hire private workers is **not smart**, but that is something that this report will allow the hospital to do again and again, without any real oversight.

The report simply recommends the same old slash and burn strategy of cutting health care in New York State. **This is not a “health care policy”. It is a budget policy.**

We will not and cannot embrace a plan that ignores the needs of the most vulnerable, the wider community, and hospital workforce.

I strongly urge you to defeat this plan. It is bad medicine for New York.