

News Release From the Safety-Net Association of Pennsylvania

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(Harrisburg, PA) The Pennsylvania House of Representatives has adopted a resolution officially recognizing the existence of a distinct group of “safety-net hospitals” in Pennsylvania and calling on the General Assembly to “take into account the special situation of these vital hospitals when implementing public policy.”

House Resolution No. 743, adopted unanimously by the House on November 26 amid a flurry of last-minute activity before the legislature adjourned for the year, defines safety-net hospitals as those that “provide a portion of their services to low-income patients – Medical Assistance, Medicare SSI, and uninsured patients – that is greater than that of 75 percent of the hospitals in Pennsylvania.”

Resolution co-sponsors included Representatives Kenney, Major, Roberts, Cornell, J. Taylor, Vance, Clark, and Jadowiec.

The resolution’s definition of “safety-net hospitals” is identical to the definition developed by the Safety-Net Association of Pennsylvania (SNAP), a newly formed organization that promoted the resolution and vigorously advocated its passage.

“This is a big step in the right direction for safety-net hospitals,” according to SNAP president Charles DeBrunner. “For the first time, we have every single member of the House – urban and rural, conservative and liberal, Republican and Democrat – acknowledging that there really are hospitals that play a special role in caring for the poor in Pennsylvania and that these hospitals require special consideration when state officials develop and implement public policies for providing health care services to the poor and for paying for those services.”

The resolution also cites the importance of ensuring the financial viability of these safety-net hospitals as a key to preserving Pennsylvania’s health care safety net – a safety net that, unlike in many other states, does not include any public hospitals because Pennsylvania no longer has any public hospitals. According to the resolution, Pennsylvania’s safety-net hospitals “care for three times as many Medical Assistance patients and fifty percent more uninsured patients as other hospitals.”

According to DeBrunner, forty-eight of the state’s 192 acute-care hospitals meet the criteria for safety net designation established in the House resolution. These hospitals vary considerably in size and are located throughout Pennsylvania in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

While SNAP formally represents only a few of these hospitals at this time, DeBrunner notes that the organization only held its first official membership meeting in mid-November and expects to grow as more safety-net hospitals recognize the unusual opportunity afforded by the special recognition from the House and the inherent value of policy-makers distinguishing their issues and needs from those of hospitals that care for far fewer poor patients.

Although the association was only formally launched late last month, the following hospitals are already SNAP members:

- Albert Einstein Medical Center (Philadelphia)
- Barnes-Kasson County Hospital (Susquehanna, Susquehanna County)
- Bradford Regional Medical Center (Bradford, McKean County)
- Monsour Medical Center (Jeanette, Westmoreland County)
- Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (Philadelphia)
- Uniontown Hospital (Uniontown, Fayette County)

SNAP's primary focus will be on Medical Assistance policies in Pennsylvania and other public policy matters that affect how safety-net hospitals serve their low-income communities and are compensated for those services by the public sector. The current Medical Assistance rate agreement between the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare and the state's hospital industry expires in 2003, for example, and SNAP intends to be an active participant and leading voice for safety-net hospitals in upcoming rate negotiations. Currently, according to the House-passed resolution, safety-net hospitals "rely more heavily on increasingly inadequate government reimbursement."

SNAP is staffed by DeBrunner and Associates, a health policy consulting and advocacy firm with extensive experience working with hospitals and health care providers that primarily serve low-income patients. The DeBrunner firm has offices in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C. DeBrunner teams with the firm of Greenlee Partners, LLC, for lobbying services in Pennsylvania.

A copy of House Resolution 743 is enclosed, as is a brief FAQ about SNAP; other materials about SNAP, including a list of safety-net hospitals in Pennsylvania, policy papers, position papers, and newsletters, are available upon request. A web site, www.pasafetynet.org, is under construction and will be operational in the near future.

For further information about the Safety-Net Association of Pennsylvania, please contact Charles DeBrunner, president, at (717) 234-6970.

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