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## Why Stability in Healthcare Policy Is Critical for West Virginia

By: Jim Kaufman, President and CEO, West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA)

As West Virginia Hospital Day at the Legislature begins on February 12, hospitals are navigating a period of unprecedented federal uncertainty and rapid policy change. In this environment, we value the efforts of West Virginia policymakers to prioritize stability in state healthcare policy. WVHA's focus is clear: protecting access to care, containing costs, strengthening our workforce, and ensuring hospitals remain essential economic pillars in communities across West Virginia.

West Virginia hospitals have a shared goal with Governor Morrisey and the Legislature of advancing economic growth by strengthening the health of West Virginia's workforce. Hospitals sit squarely at the center of that vision, providing round-the-clock care while [directly supporting](#) 54,000 jobs and [generating](#) \$16.9 billion in annual economic activity.

Beyond our economic footprint, we prioritize affordability. That's why West Virginia hospitals contribute \$182 million in uncompensated care and \$92 million in documented community benefits every year. We do this because we want to create a healthier tomorrow for all West Virginians. But we can't do it alone.

The decisions facing policymakers this session come amid sweeping federal healthcare changes. H.R. 1 also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill is fundamentally [reshaping](#) healthcare financing. Although the most consequential provisions will not take effect until 2027 and 2028, the scale of the coming impacts is already clear.

When fully implemented, Medicaid funding reductions and new limits on provider taxes and directed payment programs will reduce already stretched hospital resources in West Virginia by more than \$1 billion. These changes come in a state where [three-quarters](#) of hospital patients rely on Medicare, Medicaid, or the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA), nearly double the national average. Federal uncertainty of this magnitude demands cautious, thoughtful state-level policymaking.

On a positive note, West Virginia has been [awarded](#) \$199 million this year through the Rural Health Transformation Program, with the potential for up to \$1 billion over five years. This funding presents an important opportunity to improve patient care and healthcare delivery statewide, especially in our rural communities. How these funds are structured and used will be critical.

Hospitals need predictable state policies to plan investments, maintain essential services, and retain staff—which is why stability matters now more than ever. Changes to payment structures, regulatory requirements, or planning frameworks ripple throughout these complex, interconnected systems. With hospital costs for labor, drugs, equipment and supplies rising more than 14 percent [between 2022 and 2024](#)—and staffing costs now accounting for nearly 60 percent of expenses—additional disruption during federal transition risks compounding financial pressure, increasing administrative burden, and threatening access to care, particularly in rural communities with limited margin for error.

We applaud the Governor and the Legislature for their dedication to finding common ground and advancing policies that will benefit our state. The advancement of legislation to streamline Medicaid provider enrollment and credentialing is one example of how thoughtful reform can reduce administrative burden and allow physicians and clinical staff to spend more time caring for patients rather than navigating paperwork. Similarly, ongoing conversations around workforce development reflect an understanding that strong healthcare infrastructure supports economic development across the state.

Hospital Day at the Legislature recognizes the partnership we have with our stakeholders: policymakers, community leaders, healthcare workers and the patients and families we serve. The West Virginia Hospital Association and its member hospitals stand ready to work collaboratively with legislators and the Governor's office to navigate this period of uncertainty and ensure our hospitals emerge stronger. Our focus remains consistent: preserving access to care, holding costs down, supporting a healthcare workforce that delivers essential services 24 hours a day, and ensuring that state policies complement, rather than complicate, the implementation of federal changes still taking shape.

We look forward to ongoing collaboration that honors our shared priorities while addressing the real challenges our hospitals face daily. Together, we can build lasting healthcare solutions for West Virginia.

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