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The Hospital Factor in West Virginia's Economic Future

By: David Goldberg, Chair, West Virginia Hospital Association Board of Trustees

As Chair of the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) Board of Trustees, I want to commend Governor Morrisey and the West Virginia Legislature for their leadership and focus on job growth and economic development as the legislative session begins. From my perspective, working at the intersection of healthcare delivery and economic development, these priorities directly support the sustainability of our healthcare system.

That's why I want to speak directly to West Virginia's business leaders about why hospital sustainability must remain on the radar this session. The work being done to attract employers and strengthen our economy is vital—and its success depends in part on ensuring access to reliable, high-quality healthcare across the state.

With [54,000](#) dedicated professionals in direct employment, West Virginia's hospitals are guardians of healthcare access across our state. They fulfill a responsibility no other provider shares: delivering critical care around the clock, every day, regardless of circumstances.

This comprehensive, always-available care is precisely what makes hospitals indispensable to economic development. When site selection consultants evaluate West Virginia for business locations, healthcare access consistently ranks among their top criteria. West Virginia businesses' ability to recruit and retain talented employees depends substantially on whether their families can access reliable healthcare services. Simply put, healthcare is not just a social issue; it is fundamental economic infrastructure.

Yet West Virginia hospitals face significant financial pressures because our funding depends on the insurance mix of patients we provide care for. Fewer residents have employer-sponsored insurance, and more rely on Medicare, Medicaid, and Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA), which typically pay providers less than the cost of care. When hospitals operate on unsustainable margins, service cuts inevitably follow, and those cuts directly affect the workforce's access to care.

Beyond the threat of losing local services, the current healthcare system creates avoidable operational costs for your business. Complex healthcare paperwork stemming from unnecessary federal regulations causes employees to waste work time dealing with bureaucracy instead of doing their jobs. Doctor shortages lead to long wait times and delayed care, causing employees to miss more work for appointments.

Additionally, the enactment of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) on July 4, 2025, introduced sweeping changes that will fundamentally reshape healthcare financing across America. The uncertainty surrounding these federal changes demands careful, measured decision-making at the state level, not further disruption.

Despite these challenges, there are encouraging signs for West Virginia's future. State leaders, including Governor Morrisey and members of the West Virginia Legislature, have made job growth and economic development a top priority. Their efforts to attract new businesses, expand commercial employment opportunities, and strengthen the state's economic foundation matter deeply to the healthcare system. These initiatives do more than create jobs. They bring employer-sponsored insurance plans into our communities, providing more sustainable payments for our hospitals. That alignment between economic development and healthcare sustainability deserves continued support.

The new federal Rural Health Transformation Program also presents West Virginia with a major opportunity. Under Governor Morrisey's leadership, West Virginia was awarded \$199.5 million in the program's first year. These resources will support economic development efforts, wellness initiatives that reduce the cost of care, and the recruitment of healthcare providers. This momentum reflects a shared understanding that a strong healthcare system and a strong economy rise together.

To understand what's at stake, consider what hospitals already contribute to West Virginia's economy. Despite significant financial and regulatory challenges, West Virginia hospitals continue to anchor their communities through sustained investment. They provide \$1.12 billion in annual community benefit and generate \$16.9 billion in economic impact, supporting roughly 14 percent of the state's workforce. With nearly 4,000 open positions at hospitals across the state, healthcare remains one of West Virginia's most promising sectors for job growth. Filling these roles would strengthen care delivery while fueling local economies across the state. Even in the face of national workforce shortages, hospitals expanded their provider base by nearly 20 percent between 2020 and 2023. That progress reflects extraordinary commitment—but it is not sustainable without stronger alignment and partnership across sectors.

With continued partnership among employers, hospitals, Governor Morrisey, and West Virginia legislators, we can ensure our state maintains the healthcare infrastructure that businesses need and communities deserve. The hospital community stands ready to work with our partners this legislative session to ensure the Mountain State has the healthcare foundation necessary for long-term economic prosperity.

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