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September 8, 2009

The Honorable Pat Quinn  
Governor of the State of Illinois  
207 Statehouse  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Quinn,

On behalf of our 200 member hospitals and health systems, we respectfully ask that you use any state budget flexibility to restore Community Hospital Inpatient Psychiatric Services (CHIPS) program funding for indigent mentally ill persons. We recognize that the state faces a serious budget crisis and that everyone must work together to help meet the challenges posed by that crisis. But eliminating \$9.4 million of CHIPS funding as of July 1 is tearing a hole in the mental health care safety net, endangering many vulnerable Illinoisans.

In 2003, when state-operated hospitals for the mentally ill were being downsized and closed, the state made a commitment to communities, mental health advocates and hospitals to dedicate some of the funding from those facilities to help care for the mentally ill by establishing the CHIPS program. Through the CHIPS program, the Division of Mental Health assured patients, families and legislators that people with mental illness who were unable pay for their care and had been treated in state-operated facilities would be able to receive inpatient psychiatric care. CHIPS funds have been used to support inpatient psychiatric care in nearly three dozen hospitals in communities across the state, including Peoria, East St. Louis, Springfield and the suburbs of Chicago, where the state system lacks sufficient capacity.

Unemployment in Illinois is now at its highest level in a quarter of a century. As more people lose their jobs, homes and health insurance coverage, stress levels are escalating for families – in many cases, to the point of crisis – resulting in depression or other mental health disorders, and alcohol and drug abuse. Today there is a much greater need for mental health services, and community hospital emergency rooms and inpatient psychiatric units are being inundated with people with mental illnesses.

The dramatic increase in the volume of patients seeking care for mental illness, who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare or do not have private insurance, and the lack of inpatient facilities to refer them to means even longer waits in the emergency room. Without identified alternatives to care for mentally ill persons with acute symptoms, professionally staffed hospital inpatient psychiatric beds are the safest and most clinically responsible resource available.

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It is more critical than ever that the state keep its promise to serve and protect its most vulnerable citizens in their time of need. We urge you to use any state budget flexibility that you have to restore the \$9.4 million in funding for the CHIPS program.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Peters III  
Senior Vice President

Cc: Carol L. Adams, Ph.D., Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services  
Lorrie Jones, Ph.D., Director, IDHS/Division of Mental Health