



Herb B. Kuhn
President and CEO
P.O. Box 60
Jefferson City, MO 65102

July 27, 2021

The Honorable Eric Schmitt
Missouri State Attorney General
Missouri Attorney General's Office
Supreme Court Building
P.O. Box 899
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0899

Dear Attorney General Schmitt:

As you know, hospitalizations are increasing across Missouri as the Delta variant brings a new wave of COVID-19 infections. In the southwest region of the state, hospitals have been near or at capacity for several weeks, with other areas following a similar trajectory. Hospitals have adeptly implemented emergency plans throughout the course of this pandemic, sourcing and conserving equipment and supplies to ensure a stable allocation of resources necessary to provide patient care for all conditions.

Unfortunately, there is one resource factor largely beyond hospitals' control — staffing. A hospital can only supply a bed it is able to staff. Many of our members have the hard assets to expand bed capacity to some extent, but finding nurses, respiratory therapists and other allied health professionals to care for those patients is extremely difficult during these periods of surge. Other facilities struggle to keep online their normally-available bed supply because nurses and other patient care staff are unable to work due to COVID-19. Either situation can have a domino effect across the state, as strapped facilities seek to transfer patients to regions less impacted by the surge.

In normal circumstances, simply attracting and retaining staff to work in these conditions presents challenges. With health care professionals currently in short supply, the exceedingly high rates agencies currently are demanding to supply staff to Missouri hospitals threaten to impact their operations. Rates for specialists needed to care for Missouri COVID-19 patients, such as intensive care nurses and respiratory therapists, are two to four times the normal going rate. This particularly is difficult for our smaller, rural facilities, but impacts even our larger systems as they seek to maintain sufficient staff. The inability to afford contract labor requires existing staff to work additional hours, creating burnout among those who have been on the front lines of this pandemic for months.

I understand free market dynamics generally encourage individuals to compete for the highest wages they can earn in exchange for their skills. However, we continue to operate under a declared federal and state health emergency order. Without some effort to temper those market forces, hospitals' ability to staff needed units and provide necessary care for all Missourians who

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need it can be disrupted. I believe a condemnatory statement from you, as the state's top consumer advocate, to those who attempt to extract excessive sums from Missouri hospitals in the midst of this surge, would have a strong impact at deterring such behavior.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Herb B. Kuhn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Herb B. Kuhn
President and CEO

hbk:jd/ts