

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Massachusetts Council of Community Hospitals represents 25 community hospitals across the Commonwealth. Our mission is to advance the interests of the community hospital sector and the patients and communities they serve.

We are grateful for the interest the legislature has in better understanding the technology needs of hospitals. We are cognizant of your individual roles on your respective committees and hope that we are able to address your concerns.

We believe there is now an imperative for community hospitals to adopt advanced technologies at a more rapid rate than in the past. First, the rising expectations of patients and physicians regarding patient safety; second, the increasing reliability and greater availability of information technology and devices that more clearly provide cost effective benefits; and third, the need to have a technology level that contributes to retaining and attracting physicians, nurses and other essential clinical skills.

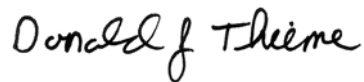
We have a unique situation at the moment in Massachusetts, largely the result of volunteer information sharing amongst the information technology executives of many of our hospitals. Years ago they formed the Massachusetts Health Data Consortium. Other executives formed MA-Share and several like organizations. This information sharing is a surprising outcome to expect in a fairly competitive marketplace. Many of these same individuals are also sitting on national committees to develop technology standards and propose more rapid paths to implement technology. A surprising outcome because Massachusetts hospitals are not seeing technology as a weapon to be employed against one another but rather how, collectively, we can quickly identify and filter the important technology, measure its appropriateness, and disseminate the means to employ it more quickly across all hospitals. At the same time the payers also are making a unique contribution to accelerating the use of technology. One example is the initiative related to e-prescribing, which uses advanced hand held devices to make a more rapid and accurate connection between a physician and pharmacy. An equally important point though is that several plans are working cooperatively to make the implementation more successful. This is a unique situation that represents good public policy and we should be building upon its foundation.

We now have several key ingredients in place that strongly suggest further investment in technology will have a very big payoff, not only in improved patient safety but in lowering the rate of health care cost increase. We have the urgency and motivation, we have tools in the marketplace, we have expertise, and we have a willingness to share for the common good. We now need the Commonwealth's continued partnership and investment to accelerate what the Massachusetts Technology Council has identified as a

pressing need with an achievable solution in Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE). We need the Commonwealth's support to access capital for technology such as electronic drug ordering, bar coding, and Picture Archiving and Communication Systems (PACS) as well.

Massachusetts community hospitals have been under financial pressure for such a long time that they are essentially starved for capital precisely at a time when they need it the most. Building on the public-private partnership around a theme of not only improving overall public safety but also insuring that Medicaid dollars will more effectively be spent seems like a very good reason to have greater public investment in our technology needs. The average community hospital is about \$3-8 million deficient in their current technology budget. Grant programs or revolving loan programs might be ways for the Commonwealth to aid our efforts. We are open to any ideas. We ask for your consideration and active involvement and commitment to a new level of patient safety.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald J. Thieme". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Donald J. Thieme
Executive Director