

Community Leaders Call on New Bedford, Fall River Mayors to Hold Meetings on Hospital Merger

Healthcare workers, social justice leaders ask Mayors Jasiel Correia and Jon Mitchell to convene meetings on planned Southcoast, Care New England merger

South Coast healthcare workers have joined labor leaders and civil rights and social justice advocates in requesting that the mayors of Fall River and New Bedford review the proposed merger between Southcoast Health and Care New England.

In a letter to Fall River Mayor Jasiel Correia and New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell, advocates from the New Bedford branch of the NAACP, Mass Senior Action, Coalition for Social Justice and others joined with healthcare and labor leaders to ask the mayors to hold an open dialogue on the merger – which has the potential to disrupt the regional economy and inhibit access to quality healthcare for South Coast residents.

The community leaders call for public meetings beyond those that are required by the regulatory process in order to “fully and transparently discuss the merger, ensure that community concerns are addressed early and explore if any positive potential of such changes can be realized.”

“Without scrutiny from elected leaders, Fall River and New Bedford residents could find their healthcare threatened as a result of this merger,” said Tyrék D. Lee, Sr., Executive Vice President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. “We’re asking our elected officials to step up and ensure strict review so that quality access to healthcare remains a priority on the South Coast.”

Advocates have raised concerns that the merger could increase healthcare costs for consumers. Southcoast Health's reimbursement rates are already above the average rate for community and disproportionate share hospitals in Massachusetts, while Care New England is Rhode Island's second largest hospital system and one of the highest paid in that state. This history of increased costs could mean that a merged system uses its market power to raise prices for consumers – leading to higher medical expenses for a region that is in need of cost containment, not growth. In addition, both Southcoast Health and Care New England have a history of laying off workers, and community leaders are concerned about workers losing their jobs in two cities that surpass state and national averages for unemployment.

"We're working together to ensure that South Coast residents continue to have access to high quality, cost effective care in this potential merger between Care New England and Southcoast Health," said Deb Fastino, Executive Director of the Coalition for Social Justice, a grassroots organization committed to economic and social justice that spans the South Coast and maintains offices in both Fall River and New Bedford. "These two corporations must recognize that people come before profits, and we're hopeful that Mayors Correia and Mitchell will advocate to protect our cities."

Healthcare workers have launched the website **www.southcoastworkervoice.org** to share information about the potential merger with the community.