

Testimony of Victoria Veltri
Before the
Executive and Legislative Nominations committee
February 7, 2019

Good day Senator Duff, Representative Vargas, Senator Looney, Representative Phipps, Senator Fasano, Representative Perillo, and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Victoria Veltri and it is an honor and privilege to be nominated by Governor Ned Lamont to serve as the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy.

Healthcare is among the most critical systems impacting Connecticut residents, our communities, and our economy, so I thank this committee for the opportunity to discuss how the Office of Health Strategy—OHS—can best serve the people of Connecticut. Last February, I was before many of you when I was first appointed to this position. Today, I am looking forward to sharing not only my background, but also some of OHS' early accomplishments.

The General Assembly, in a strong bipartisan effort, fully established OHS in 2018 to better use existing state resources, centralize health policymaking, and advance the healthcare reforms that will drive down healthcare costs; address our state's deeply entrenched racial, economic, and gender health disparities; and undertake technology-driven modernization efforts.

Underpinning everything we do is our mission to forward high-quality, affordable, and accessible healthcare for all residents. We have a truly collaborative relationship with a variety of partners, experts, consumers, and stakeholder groups that help us examine and address the barriers in Connecticut's health system—cost, access, and outcomes. A healthy population creates value for employers, is necessary for a strong economy, and is key to a high quality of life.

I'm proud to call Connecticut home and have been honored to serve in state government for the past 13 years. My interest in healthcare began in my family—they are all scientists. My mom was a school nurse in East Hartford; my father was a research scientist at United Technologies and also served two terms as a Republican state representative from East Hartford, my brothers are a doctor and a veterinarian, all of this makes me an outlier as a lawyer.

I actually began my career as a chemist, but it was being an environmental specialist that led me to public interest work, first to Greater Hartford Legal Aid and then to the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, where I spent five years as General Counsel and five years as the Healthcare Advocate serving individuals and addressing systemic healthcare issues like timely access to mental health and substance use treatment.

I said this last February and I still believe it: The most important skills that I bring to OHS are listening to and collaborating with stakeholders. Throughout my years as the Healthcare Advocate, the Chief Health Policy Advisor for former Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman, and as the current Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy, I've worked with many of you and your colleagues; industry representatives; a range of stakeholders from providers to patients; and our federal delegation to find solutions to the most intractable problems in healthcare and to address the challenges we face as a small state with a widely divergent economic and cultural mix—the affordability of care and closing the gaps in care facing people of color; low-income individuals; the LGBTQ community; and women.

I am happy to have the support of those partners today because healthcare is about people, and my goal is always to find a solution. If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, that is how I will continue to work.

OHS must be responsive to the ever-evolving healthcare landscape. From examining the impact of near-daily federal-level rule changes to driving the initiatives that improve statewide healthcare policy, I am deeply involved in all of OHS' efforts and I believe deeply in its mission.

Since OHS was fully established in March of 2018, I'm pleased to report:

- OHS has received a \$12 million federal grant to support the rollout of the first statewide Health Information Exchange, an initiative that will connect providers and patients and vastly strengthen population health data gathering.
- OHS established a community health worker advisory committee and, in October, submitted a report to the legislature recommending steps forward for certification. This will expand care teams and directly address social determinants of health.
- OHS is working closely with the Comptroller and the Insurance Department on implementation of Public Act 18-41 to contain prescription drug costs by making companies justify price increases.
- OHS is working with the Comptroller to develop an affordability standard for healthcare in Connecticut so we can ensure we understand the implication of policy change on cost.
- OHS launched a value-based insurance design consortium to help large employers in the state incentivize employees to engage in preventive care and management of chronic diseases.
- OHS modified Certificate of Need application questions to address payment and delivery reforms and streamlined the process to remove delays. We have opened up the CON process to a new

level of transparency and engagement of local communities with the launch of a new one-stop webpage.

- OHS developed Health Enhancement Communities, geographic areas that target interventions and provide clear focus on preventing costly health conditions and improving social determinants like housing, education, and jobs.
- OHS is dedicating resources to support deep consumer engagement across Connecticut to keep us focused on the diverse needs of communities around the state, to ensure we are listening and acting on input we get, and maintaining partnerships that help inform our work.

Like all states, Connecticut is challenged by how best to ensure the promise of high-quality healthcare. With the support of Governor Lamont, the General Assembly, and the expertise of an extraordinarily committed staff, we can rise to that challenge and lead on health policy and healthcare.

I would like to thank Governor Lamont for his nomination and support, and thank all of you on this committee for giving me the opportunity to address you today. It is my hope we can continue our productive work together on behalf of our residents.