



420 Capitola Avenue
Capitola, California 95010
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December 12, 2025

To:

The Honorable Robert Rivas, Speaker of the California State Assembly (27th Assembly District)
The Honorable John Laird, California State Senator (17th Senate District)
The Honorable Dawn Addis, California State Assemblymember (30th Assembly District)
Leaders, California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI)

CC: The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, U.S. House of Representatives (19th Congressional District)
CC: The Honorable Jimmy Panetta, U.S. House of Representatives (20th Congressional District)
CC: Stephen Gray, Chief Executive Officer, Pajaro Valley Health Care District

Subject: Urgent Support for Watsonville Community Hospital and the Pajaro Valley Health Care District

On behalf of the City of Capitola, we write to express our strong support for the Pajaro Valley Health Care District (PVHCD) and its sole acute-care facility, Watsonville Community Hospital (WCH), and to urge your continued investment in this essential regional resource.

WCH serves approximately 93,000 residents across Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties, providing nearly 35,000 emergency visits and about 800 births annually, the highest in Santa Cruz County. Its patient population is predominantly Medi-Cal, government-insured, or uninsured. WCH is a critical hub for emergency, maternity, and acute-care services, serving rural and medically underserved populations. Nearby hospitals, including Dominican Hospital and Natividad Medical Center, already operate at or near capacity.

Any reduction or closure of WCH services would strain neighboring hospitals, increase travel times, overcrowd emergency departments, delay urgent care, and worsen health outcomes.

Since its transition to public ownership in 2022, WCH has made significant progress rebuilding operations, strengthening services, and upgrading infrastructure with voter support through Measure N. Nonetheless, challenges—including a cyberattack, clinician departures, and long-deferred maintenance—threaten stability, and federal reforms under H.R. 1 add new pressures to rural safety-net hospitals.

The District has developed a community-grounded strategy to stabilize and modernize WCH, including expanding specialty and primary care, advancing telehealth, strengthening partnerships with local providers, and workforce development initiatives with Cabrillo College, the Morehouse School of Medicine Dominican Family Medicine Residency Program, and the forthcoming UCSC/UC Davis medical school.

To successfully execute this strategy—and preserve essential hospital services—targeted investment through the State of California's Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), including transformation payments and consideration as a regional hub hospital, is urgently



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needed. We respectfully urge your office to prioritize WCH for these resources to ensure long-term access to quality care, health equity, and economic stability for our region.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of our community.

Sincerely,

Joe Clarke, Mayor
City of Capitola
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citycouncil@ci.capitola.ca.us