March 10, 2021

The Honorable Connie Leyva
Chair, Senate Education Committee
State Capitol, Room 2083
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: SB 379 (Wiener) – Oppose

Dear Senator Leyva:

The Alliance of Catholic Health Care represents California's Catholic-affiliated health systems and hospitals and together, our health systems operate 51 acute care hospitals, which represent nearly 15% of all hospitals and over 16% of the hospital beds in California. We write to oppose SB 379 (Wiener).

This measure, if enacted, could unravel much of the health care safety net that provides access to care and addresses health inequities impacting thousands of Californians across the State. These partnerships support a broad range of specialized clinical programs and facilitates care coordination for patients who would not otherwise receive these health services. And over the last year, these relationships have been crucial to the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to note that the bill is very broad, as UC Health has contracts with many health care facilities throughout the State. All hospitals make "policy-based" decisions about the services that are provided in their hospital that could be construed as "non-clinical" based on community need, cost of providing the care, patient safety, quality measures, as well as specializing in certain kinds of care, facility licensing requirements or limitations, and for very few elective procedures, a deeply held religious belief. And like all hospitals, Catholic health care providers do not offer every service, but partnerships, like those with UC Health, are critical to ensuring access to high quality care.

Affiliations between the UC Health System and health care providers, including both secular and Catholic health care providers, are at the core of California's public health care safety net. They are essential to ensuring and expanding access to quality health care services across our State – especially so for underserved communities.

Alliance member Dignity Health and UC Health are the #1 and #2 Medi-Cal providers in our State, respectively. Agreements between them are key to caring for this population: providing timely care, alleviating capacity challenges and conserving scarce financial resources.

Furthermore, in many cases these partnerships represent the only locally available care of its kind. Included below are examples of some of the partnerships between UC Health and Catholic health care providers that would be in jeopardy if the bill goes into effect.

- In Los Angeles, UCLA specialists provide the **only locally available pediatric-trauma services** in the San Fernando Valley at Northridge Hospital. Launched in 2010, this Level II Pediatric Trauma Center provides immediate care for infants,

children, and adolescents with life-threatening traumatic injuries 24/7. The Center has coverage by more than 20 subspecialty physicians 24-hours-a-day; and, technologically-advanced equipment to effectively resuscitate young patients regardless of age or body size. In 2019 alone, the program treated 700 patients.

- The San Fernando Valley's **only radiation oncology treatment center** is a partnership between UCLA and Northridge Hospital. It served 8,500 patients in fiscal year 2019.

- In Los Angeles County, UCLA specialists provide call coverage at Providence Saint John's Health Center for **pediatric and neonatal surgery**, interventional cardiology, and inpatient psychiatry

- Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center in San Pedro partners with UCLA to provide their patients with **post-transplant care** in its sub-acute center.

- In partnership with UCLA, Providence Saint John's Health Center operates the **Cleft Palate Center**, a nationally recognized program that provides surgical services to children with cleft lip and craniofacial abnormalities.

- UC Davis and Mercy Medical Center Merced jointly run a cancer center providing treatment for more than 12,000 patients annually – **the only cancer center of its kind in the region**.

- In partnership with UCSF, St. Mary's Medical Center offers the **only inpatient adolescent psychiatry program** in San Francisco, seeing more than 1,000 patients in fiscal year 2019.

- St. Joseph's Medical Center in Stockton partners with UCSF to give patients access to **cancer clinical trials that would otherwise be out of reach**.

- Clinical education, fellowships, and **residency programs for physician, nursing, physician assistant, physical therapy, and paramedic students** at Providence hospitals in Humboldt, Sonoma, Napa, Los Angeles, and Orange counties.

- In Sonoma County, UCSF specialists help provide **care for fragile, critically ill newborns** at Providence Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital. Through this partnership, Providence has direct access to the resources of one of the finest intensive care nurseries in the world and can **perform specialized procedures in Santa Rosa that would otherwise require a trip to San Francisco**.

- In Napa County, UCSF neurosurgeons perform **cranial and spinal surgery** at Providence Queen of the Valley Medical Center's Peggy Herman Neurosciences Center.

In this pandemic, partnerships are more vital than ever. Every year, these relationships support programs that serve tens of thousands of Californians. Right now, they are an indispensable element of California's battle against the pandemic and protect its most vulnerable residents from it. At a time when COVID-19 is placing unprecedented demands on our State's health care providers, any effort to weaken that safety net would only harm the state's most vulnerable residents.

From COVID-19 testing to treatment to vaccination, these partnerships have efficiently leveraged scarce front-line medical, bed-capacity, PPE, testing and vaccine resources.

- Dignity Health's Saint Francis Memorial Hospital and UCSF Health have worked together to open **San Francisco's first dedicated unit to care for COVID-19 patients**. The unit is staffed by physicians from both Dignity Health and UCSF Health and care for up to 48 patients at a time.

- In January, Dignity Health partnered with UCSF on the city's first **large-scale community vaccination event** at City College of San Francisco. UCSF and Dignity Health partnered with the City and County of San Francisco to open the city's first dedicated COVID-19 unit at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital.

- Mercy Medical Center Merced and UC Merced are partnering on **community vaccine clinics** to vaccinate over 2,500 people; and additional clinics are planned.

- Sacramento County's Department of Public Health in partnership with Dignity Health and UC Davis Health hosted a community-based **COVID-19 vaccination clinic** this month.

Catholic health care proudly serves and is dedicated to the care of our LGBTQ community members throughout the State. Catholic health care providers affirm our commitment to equitable, knowledgeable and welcoming care for LGBTQ patients and their families. These patients have too often faced discrimination in health care, and our members are committed to nondiscrimination in the compassionate care they offer all Californians.

- Catholic health providers **serve all patients** regardless of their background, sexual orientation, or gender identity – providing care for gay and transgender patients every day at its hospitals and clinics across the State.

- Catholic hospitals offer **primary, specialty and urgent care for transgender patients**, including hormone therapy, breast augmentation or reduction, and facial feminization or masculinization.

- Several Catholic hospitals in California are **Healthcare Equality Index (HEI)** certified, which is the national LGBTQ benchmarking tool that evaluates health care facilities' policies and practices related to the equity and inclusion of their LGBTQ patients, visitors and employees.

- Catholic hospitals provide **PrEP and PEP**, HIV prevention treatment in our health facilities and physician offices – some of our hospitals follow the UCSF guidelines.

- Dignity Health operates one of the only **specialty transgender care centers** in San Francisco, the Gender Institute at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital. The SFMH Gender Institute has been established to deliver compassionate, high-quality, affordable health services to transgender patients and their families. The program is committed to delivering excellence in the overall care for patients of all gender identities and offer "best in class" experience in healthcare for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.

- St. Mary's Medical Center in San Francisco has been providing compassionate, groundbreaking outpatient care to HIV patients since the AIDS epidemic devastated the city in the early 1980s. A UCSF specialist leads the **HIV clinic**.

We understand the interest raised about the partnerships UC Health has with other health care providers, including Catholic health care facilities. Contrary to what has been alleged:
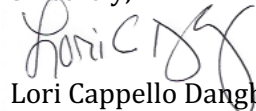
- We expect every clinician to inform patients of all their health care options; and to refer and/or transfer a patient to another provider if a certain service is not offered. There are **no "gag clauses"** on any of the physicians we work with.

- Our members provide the **standard of care for pregnancy complications**, including ectopic pregnancies. Emergent and urgent care is always provided – even if it results in the foreseen, but unintended, death of a fetus.

- Our health facilities provide compassionate care to victims of sexual assault, including the provision of **emergency contraception**.

- While Catholic hospitals do not perform every procedure, the services we do provide are **provided to all members of the community without discrimination**. Procedures that have the sole purpose of sterilization are not permitted for any patient, without regard to sex or gender identity.

In the decades we have been working together to provide services, we are not aware of any instance in which a patient did not receive the care they needed. Nonetheless, our members and UC have worked to amend our contracts and agreements to allay any such concerns.

The mission of Catholic health care is to provide access to care for those who need it the most. All across California, Catholic health care providers are partnering with others like UC Health to deliver care to patients that other providers don't or won't serve, with services other providers don't or won't offer, in parts of the state where other providers don't or won't have a presence. Dissolving these partnerships would disenfranchise health care access for millions of health inequity-impacted Californians, doing an enormous disservice to our State's goal of expanding health care access for the underserved.

For these reasons, we must oppose SB 379 (Weiner), and we look forward to ongoing discussions with you and your colleagues to discuss the services and care these partnerships provide throughout the State to our most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Lori Cappello Dangberg
Vice President

cc: Senator Scott Wiener
     Honorable Members, Senate Education Committee