FIRST STATE BANK
OF THE FLORIDA KEYS

August 9, 2016

Stephen Pennington
Interim CEO
Lower Keys Medical Center
5900 College Road
Key West, FL 33040

Dear Mr. Pennington:

As you know, First State Bank of the Florida Keys is one of the largest employers in the Lower Keys, with over 115 employees located within a 30 mile radius of Lower Keys Medical Center (LKMC). In the past year, we have noted a significant increase in employee complaints regarding costs of services rendered, quality of service received and inconsistent billing at LKMC. The increase in and nature of the complaints gives us cause for concern and are the reasons we are reaching out to you today.

We are deeply disturbed by the apparent lack of transparency and commitment to our shared community. The practices that are purportedly employed at Lower Keys Medical Center as described by our employees are diametrically opposed to those outlined on your web site, wherein you outline a 'Pricing Transparency Policy' and a 'Commitment to Our Community'. As such, we offer the following samples of employee complaints regarding Lower Keys Medical Center received within the last six months.

Employee #1: Went for annual well-woman checkup. Lump under arm was found. GYN referred her for mammogram and sonogram. Employee went on Aetna website to cost of care estimator, but no information was listed for area providers. Employee contacted Lower Keys Medical Center to request a cost estimate for the diagnostic tests (mammogram and sonogram). LKMC was reluctant to give cost estimate, but eventually was told it would be $790, which employee could pay in 3 installments or LKMC would extend a discount if paid up front. Employee contacted another area provider and was quoted $500 for the same diagnostic tests. Employee also inquired with the mobile mammo-van and was quoted $50. GYN stated that the tests could not be performed by the mobile mammo-van because only LKMC doctors were qualified to read the results. Employee ended up driving to Orlando to have the diagnostic testing done at a cost of $150 (including reading results) for both mammogram and sonogram. Despite time and travel costs, overall expense was lower for the employee, employee had to take time off work to travel and have the procedures done.

Employee #2: Took child to LKMC emergency room with complaints of lingering cough (1.5 weeks) and difficulty breathing. LKMC ER admitted child. LKMC doctor diagnosed child with pneumonia or some other unidentified respiratory issue. Child remained in regular hospital room for 2 days, constantly complaining of inability to breathe. No breathing treatment was administered, no tests were administered. After 2 days, doctors measured son's lung capacity at 20%, which then prompted doctors to move child to the ICU and place child on a breathing machine. ICU doctor then recommended immediate transport via airlift to Mt. Sinai hospital in Miami. Child spent 12 days at Mt. Sinai (9 of which were in ICU). Upon arrival, Mt. Sinai took tissue culture, administered a battery of tests, began treating and within 2 days results were provided. Employee believes that LKMC was neglectful in their initial assessment and treatment of child and dismissive of child's symptoms and complaints. Employee further believes that had it not been for one ICU doctor at LKMC initiating the medical evacuation to Mt. Sinai, child would have died.

Employee #3: Went to primary care physician for annual physical. Due to ongoing intermittent abdominal pain, doctor ordered an ultrasound. Employee contacted LKMC for a cost estimate for the diagnostic procedure and was quoted $901.40. Employee contacted an alternate local facility (out-of-network) and was quoted $235 for same procedure. Employee decided to use alternate facility.

Employee #4: In November 2015, FSB employee called LKMC to schedule a neck X-ray as ordered by primary physician after annual checkup. The LKMC employee scheduling the procedure insisted that LKMC did not do this procedure and was extremely rude. FSB employee had to contact physician's office to resolve the matter. The physician's office called LKMC and found out that LKMC does do the procedure but an appointment is not necessary. When FSB employee went to LKMC to have the procedure done, the LKMC employee handling the check-in stated that the procedure would cost $1,570. The FSB employee refused to pay that much saying the charge was ridiculously high. The LKMC employee then offered the "hospital discount" self-pay option and indicated that the total cost would only be $331.14. The FSB employee agreed to have the procedure done and paid the $331.14. At the end of November, the FSB employee received a bill from LKMC for an additional $227.86. The employee went to the hospital's billing department who stated that the additional $227.86 was because the LKMC employee who billed for the procedure read the doctor's orders and billed for two X-rays. However, the X-ray technician made four X-rays of the neck. The billing department said that this was the normal procedure and that the primary physician was using old forms. However, no attempt was made at the time of the procedure to contact the primary physician to clarify the orders or to explain any of this to the FSB employee. The billing department agreed to look into the matter. In February 2016, the FSB employee received another bill from LKMC only this time the amount due was $850.74. The FSB employee again contacted LKMC's billing department and was told that someone at LKMC had filed insurance for this procedure in 2016. Despite assurances from hospital staff and from billing personnel that the matter was being "elevated", the employee has now received a bill from a collection agency. After "haggling with the hospital and getting nowhere", the employee contacted the citizen advocate on the Board (Bryan Green) who put her in touch with the CFO of the hospital. She then had to convince the CFO that it was useless to try to go through their billing department since this was a hospital error made by the admissions people. The employee still had to talk to several other people and re-explain the entire situation. Finally, the bill was adjusted as paid in full. The employee commented that Mr. Green was instrumental in resolving this and because of his efforts the billing department called to apologize.

Employee #4 continued: Last week the FSB employee noted above went back to the hospital for a mammogram and bone density test. She was told that the bone density test would be $770 because her insurance deductible had not been met but that she could get a 20% discount if she paid up front (meaning that they would not file with the insurance company.) As doing this had set in motion the above described fiasco, the employee declined the test. Instead, she went to Fisherman's Hospital where she is being charged $440 and only has to pay 25% with the rest will go through her insurance.

Additional Issues: More than a dozen employees have contacted the Bank's HR Department with concerns about LKMC billing issues. These include billing errors and large bills with no detail or itemization. When the employees attempt to speak with someone at the LKMC billing office, they quite often get voice mail with no returned calls and do not receive itemized bills even after frequent requests. With little turn-around time and still no resolution, the bills are then turned over to collection agencies. Several employees have had their credit negatively impacted, necessitating calls to credit agencies and in one case an employee's records have been subpoenaed and the employee is scheduled to appear in court.

It was reported in the Key West Citizen that you have vowed to listen to the problems at LKMC. LKMC should be a partner in providing necessary services to the local community, and as such, we would like to bring these concerns to your attention so that these issues will receive the attention they deserve. The ongoing billing issues, the arduous process one has to go through to obtain an itemized bill and how quickly these bills are sent to collection agencies are but a few of the constant problems our employees have been experiencing.

It is our sincere hope that improvements will be made so that future patients do not encounter the same challenges and frustrations when seeking much-needed medical care from Lower Keys Medical Center. As you well know, this is a small community with limited options for certain types of providers and services. We care deeply for our employees, their dependents and for all members of the Lower Keys community. It gives us pause when many examples are brought forth regarding instances where a community partner has not treated our employees with the care, dignity and respect they deserve. As such, this letter is an attempt to resolve these issues by bringing this to the attention of the hospital, the CTROH (Committee to Rescue our Hospital) and our insurance provider. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Kay Miller

Kay Miller
VP, HR Director

CC: Bryan Green, Member, Board of Trustees, Lower Keys Medical Center
Harry Bethel, former KW City Commissioner