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# **Testimony of Benjamin H. Venger, MD**

## **In support of Nevada Senate Bill 156**

### **Nevada Senate Committee for Human Resources and Facilities**

**March 26, 2003  
Carson City, Nevada**

My name is Benjamin Venger. I have been in Nevada over 40 years, and currently am the managing partner of the Western Regional Center for Brain and Spine Surgery. My partners and I represent one of the most unique Neurosurgical practices in the United States. Within my group are recognized experts in many areas of our field. Together we perform the majority of both adult and pediatric intracranial and neurosurgical spine procedures within Southern NV. In addition, we have also developed and maintain one of the largest Neurosurgical outreach clinic systems in the United States. Our five offices outside of Las Vegas serve patients from Southern Utah to Northern Arizona, and into the adjacent areas of California.

My group and I have been instrumental in bringing technology and new services to our community. I have a particular interest and expertise in Neurosurgical Pain Management. My fellow Nevadan, Mr. Jerry Lewis, is not only a prominent example but one of many, who have benefited from our shared vision – to provide as diverse as armamentarium as possible, directed at all aspects of Neurosurgical disease, to the have the opportunity to choose the best of that which is available, and to develop a Center of Excellence on par with any clinic or like hospital in the world.

Nevada and Las Vegas are known as destination centers for entertainment, gaming, shopping, golf, conventions, sporting events, and the list goes on. Having faced recent setbacks and current challenges in Southern Nevada, we strive for the best in healthcare access and delivery for all whom we treat. As we move farther into the millenium, our infrastructure will not be complete, without our community health foundation being more than just providing “good medical care”. We can do more, and it is why we are here in Carson City today.

Our Center of Excellence includes a speciality hospital of limited size and scope, which focuses on conditions of pain, spine and musculoskeletal disorders. We plan to merge this with a world-class anatomy and teaching facility. Only two such facilities exist in the United States, one in St. Louis, the other in Memphis. Mr. Brad Hancock is prepared to discuss the impact that the Memphis facility has on his community. He represents Sofamor Danek, the world’s premiere corporation dedicated to research, development, and sales of spine related technology, nationally based also in Memphis. A like facility

in Las Vegas would become the west coast center for similar teaching and educational efforts.

Next to him is Mr. Mike Griffin of Medtronic Neurologic. This company, based in Minneapolis is the world leader for the technology of pain management. Like Sofamor Danek, they too are a corporation focused on education, academic investigation and teaching, as well as healthcare product delivery. Mr. Lewis has added his powerful voice to champion the cause of those who may benefit from our expertise and commitment, along with that of our corporate partners. He has helped us refine what we need this hospital to become, based upon his unique perspective as a health care advocate.

Other medical companies have also expressed interest in our Center of Excellence. We have many letters of interest and support to share with you, and we welcome their participation. Many wish to use our teaching center and anatomy lab as the primary facility of this type throughout the west coast. We will strive to be inclusive, not exclusive, for all companies stepping up to our support and to reap the benefits from our project.

Inclusive not exclusive, this is the reason we are in front of your committee today. Our speciality hospital will become the clinical arm of our facility. Within the context of a focused speciality hospital, we can invite all interested parties to participate.

For many companies, this is the only way their technology can be fully demonstrated and used in our community.

For physicians, it allows us diversity in our medical decisions, to use what we think is best.

For our patients, access to what we recommend, including cutting edge technology.

For our University Systems, they will have the opportunity to be our research partner, and benefit from the inclusion of the best of medical industry. We will also promote all educational programs, and support initiatives to train and attract speciality Nurses and Allied Health to our community. In Nevada, our state already financially supports the education of both undergraduate and graduate students. Why not create opportunity to retain the best of the best here in Nevada? Why not enhance the exposure of biotechnology and medicine to those who would not have the opportunity or means to participate? Mr. Tom Williams of the UNLV Research Foundation will testify to this.

For our Medical School, access to visiting clinicians of national and international reputation, as well as the opportunity to participate in not only anatomic prosection surgery, but actual cases within the speciality hospital.

For my partners, and for myself, our vision is to attract the best and brightest of Neurosurgery, and to have them join us in Southern Nevada. Due to the circumstances related to our current malpractice crisis, we lost the opportunity to attract one of the

leaders in Neurosurgical Pain Management worldwide, and one of the most promising young neurosurgeons finishing his training this year. Our local paper even felt that this was newsworthy. I believe that a speciality hospital such as this would have changed one, or both of their minds. It is our loss, our patient's loss, and ultimately Nevada's loss.

And for the hospitals we currently work in, we are the backbone of their Neurosurgery Services. The size and scope of our speciality hospital is such that only a small fraction of our total work can be done there. Our emphasis is on non-life threatening conditions. We have no intensive care facilities, nor desire any. We cannot practice our trade without you. We will remain on your medical staff, and honor our commitment through the bylaws to cover your emergency departments.

Remember, my partners and I manage the Neurosurgery Trauma contract at UMC, and will continue to do so. We have over the last few months, increased our elective surgical commitment there, to help your financial difficulties. We are in the process of developing full inpatient neurosurgical programs at St. Rose Sienna and Mt. View Hospitals. We have been key to the initial discussions of a second Trauma Center at Sunrise Hospital. I am also the Neurosurgical Co-Director of the Sunrise Neuroscience Program. While you chose not to emphasize spinal surgery and pain management, Mr. Lewis will be happy to know that Muscular Dystrophy was in fact included.

Our program will thus compliment yours. In fact, we did ask each CEO of the acute general hospitals in Southern Nevada if they were interested in building this 15 bed focused specialty facility. The answer was no. We then understood that we must proceed alone. The ultimate winner will of course, be all of our patients.

Finally for our community, our project represents opportunity: The creation of jobs, the diversification of our economy, and a Center of Excellence that we can all take pride in.

Most importantly, this Center of Excellence sends another, very important and very clear message – we believe that our community and our state will find a way to resolve the turbulence and uncertainty that physicians face in Southern Nevada today, especially in a high profile and high liability specialty like mine. We will clearly say that we are not leaving. We will clearly say, come join us. We will clearly say that this Center of Excellence will always remain at the forefront of medical practice within our community, within our state, and well beyond. Ladies and Gentlemen, this world class research and clinical hospital will not be build unless Senate Bill 156 is passes. It begins here today.