

No Program Cuts At Bethany Hospital For At Least Six Weeks

Bob Roberts Reporting

CHICAGO (WBBM Newsradio 780) -- The Illinois Health Facilities Planning board wants more information from Advocate Health Care on plans to eliminate the mental health, substance abuse, and obstetrics units at Bethany Hospital.

The proposed elimination of the programs at Bethany, 3435 W. Van Buren St., had been scheduled for a vote by the board at its April 25 meeting.

Illinois Department of Public Health spokesperson Melanie Arnold said late Wednesday that the vote has been postponed tentatively until June 6, and could be delayed even further.

WBBM's Bob Roberts reports the decision means that all three units will remain in operation for at least six additional weeks.

Arnold cited comments from members of the public who said at a sometimes raucous public hearing late last month that the services were essential to the community.

"I think the Planning Board saw first hand the kind of emotion and intensity of opposition that this issue has aroused, and they were pretty clear that this had an impact on their decision to postpone the vote," said Clergy Committed to Save Bethany spokesman Mike Truppa.

The order does not reinstate emergency room services at Bethany, which were eliminated last month.

"The pressure on Advocate to restore the emergency room is purely from a moral perspective," Truppa said.

Arnold would not detail what the board is requesting from Advocate, only that it will factor into the board's decision.

The board acted one day after a lively march and demonstration in which a prominent south side minister accused Advocate officials of racism.

The Rev. Jeremiah Wright, pastor of the south side Trinity United Church of Christ, compared the investment made in Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, in Park Ridge, with the scaling back of services at Bethany, and said it was un-Christian.

"Yes, it's a Christian organization -- in name," Wright said of Advocate. "But so is the Ku Klux Klan."

Trinity, at 400 W. 95th St., is the nation's largest United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination. UCC holds half of the seats on Advocate's board.

The Rev. Cy Fields, of the west side New Landmark Missionary Baptist Church, said the West Side needs the services Bethany is eliminating.

"To have to go another two or three miles to another hospital, it can be very life-critical," he said. "People can lose their lives."

Advocate has said that until now, Bethany has been "under- utilized," and that conversion would make it the only long-term acute care center on the West Side and one of only seven such facilities in the Chicago area, serving patients with complex medical conditions such as heart disease, stroke and severe wounds.

Advocate said such patients have an average length of stay of 25 days.

An Advocate spokesman said that Rush University Medical Center, Mount Sinai Hospital and Cook County Hospital remain available for a full range of services.

Fields accused Advocate of systematically allowing Bethany to fall into disrepair, and as a result, its services into disuse.

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