

Cook County Police Summoned After Protest Revolving Around Hospitals

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When Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge joined with other healthcare institutions to form an Advocate Healthcare organization a few years ago, they intended it as simply a wise economic move in challenging financial times.

But the move created one of the largest healthcare conglomerates in the Chicago area, and one of the fallouts is that Advocate has become a target for protests and criticism by minority groups and unions.

Protests, particularly by the Service Employees International Union, a group of large minority employees of Advocate hospitals, including Lutheran General, have been held on a number of occasions recently.

The activists claim that Advocate hospitals discriminate in their investment and hospital improvement practices, giving priority to suburban hospitals employing largely white populations, and ignoring inner city hospitals employing and serving large minority populations.

Things came close to boiling over, but did not quite do so thanks to cooler heads, at an Advocate fund-raiser Aug. 9 at the LaGrange Country Club in west suburban LaGrange, near Advocate's headquarters in Oak Brook.

The protest was not directed specifically at Lutheran General, but at the Advocate organization.

A group of more than 200 demonstrators showed up at the event, and were allegedly unruly enough to precipitate a 9-1-1 call from Advocate officials. It was answered by several units of the Cook County Sheriff's Police, Cook County Forest Preserve Police, and units of several west suburban police agencies.

By the time law enforcement officials arrived, the protest had reportedly ended and the protesters were leaving in a convoy of six school buses and six cars. They were stopped by police and brought back to the country club to "sort things out," according to one Sheriff's Police spokesperson.

An allegation that one Forest Preserve officer drew his weapon at one point during the confrontations and discussions was unconfirmed.

“The 9-1-1 caller said the group disrupted the fundraising speeches with chants and noise and were milling around the country club and running across the golf course,” said a sheriff’s police spokesperson.

“They were brought back to the country club and sort things out and determine if there were any injuries or a need for charges. Fortunately, no one was hurt, no one was charged, and no arrests were made.”

She also said that no Sheriff’s Police officer drew a weapon at any time during the event.

“This year, Advocate has proposed spending more than \$500 million on improving its suburban hospitals serving mostly white patients, while once again ignoring its hospitals in Chicago, “said a Chicago pastor who said he was speaking for the Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations (MAC), which is joining with the union in criticizing Advocate. The groups are urging Advocate to invest equally in all its hospitals, increase its commitment to charity care, work more to secure workers’ rights, and secure fair treatment of uninsured patients.