



SOUTHEAST

Union: Hospital funding unfair to minority areas

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By Daniel Duggan
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Union officials, clergy and community activists on Wednesday accused Advocate Health Systems of spending more money to improve its hospitals in predominantly white communities than ones in predominantly minority areas.

The Service Employees International Union, which has tried to organize Advocate workers, released a report alleging Advocate spent nearly 10 times more on projects at four suburban hospitals compared with three Chicago facilities and South Suburban Hospital in Hazel Crest.

Advocate said the report's claims were "false, groundless and an unjust characterization of Advocate's faith-based health care ministry."

Byron Hobbs, president of SEIU Local 20, said the issue is a matter of equality.

"Citizens who reside on the West Side of Chicago are entitled to the same access to quality health care as citizens who reside in Barrington," he said at a rally held outside Bethany Hospital on Chicago's West Side.

He was joined by U.S. Rep. Danny Davis (D-Chicago) and Chicago church leaders who said Advocate is not treating all communities fairly.

Advocate spent \$232 million on capital projects at Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Good Samaritan in Downers Grove, Good Shepard in Barrington and Lutheran General in Park Ridge between 1995 and 2003, the union said.

Meanwhile, \$26 million was invested in Trinity Hospital on Chicago's South Side, Bethany, Illinois Masonic and South Suburban Hospital during the same period, the union said.

The proposed 2004 projects would continue the gap, with \$276 million in projects for the predominantly white communities and \$21 million for predominantly black communities, the union stated.

"The question of the day seems to be 'Does Advocate Health Systems have a higher value on white lives than it does on black lives?'" said the Rev. Marshall Hatch of New Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church on the city's West Side.

The union's figures are based on proposals filed with the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, which reviews large hospital projects. The threshold that required filings ranged from \$2.5 million in 1995 to \$6.7 million in 2004, said Tammy Leonard, a spokeswoman for the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Advocate released a statement that called the report "the latest effort by the SEIU to malign Advocate" in an ongoing unionization efforts.

"Until we have a chance to review this, we are not in a position to provide a counterpoint to their claims," Advocate spokesman Mike Maggio said.

Joseph Geevarghese, who headed the project for the SEIU, said the research was sparked by complaints from employees, along with Advocate's recent request to build a new hospital in Tinley Park.

He denied the report was part of the union's attempts to organize Advocate employees.

"It would be addressed in a different manner if the workers were be at the table," Geevarghese said. "We have to raise these issues from the outside because they don't have a seat at the table."

Davis called on the union and Advocate to find a resolution to the funding issues and the representation issues in the near future.

"We all need to sit at the table and find a resolution to this, and I believe we can find a resolution," he said.

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