



WEST SIDE HEALTH CRISIS COALITION

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CONTACT: Elce Redmond, South Austin Coalition, 773-287-4570

PRESS RELEASE

WESTSIDE GROUP LAUNCHES HEALTH CRISIS COALITION



Westside community members turned out for the launch of the West Side Health Crisis Coalition (WHCC). The group hopes to bring attention and solutions to racial disparities in health care. Photo by Paul Merideth.

CHICAGO—The West Side Health Crisis Coalition (WHCC) was officially launched during an evening awards banquet April 21 at Mandell United Methodist Church. The goal of the coalition of Westside community groups is to bring attention and solutions to racial disparities in health care.

Coalition Chair Rev. Gregory Livingston cited dire Westside health care statistics that included childhood obesity levels of 53 percent in North Lawndale and 47 percent in Humboldt Park, high levels of diabetes among adults and a growing number of uninsured adults.

Rita Jackson, Director of Morise Organization, singled out Advocate Health Care, the city's largest health care provider, as an abuser of its "community and faith-based covenant" through alleged practices of racial redlining in investments at its urban and suburban

hospitals. Advocate operates with Bethany Hospital which is located on the Westside. A recent study by the Hospital Accountability Project of the Service Employees International Union showed significant discrepancies by Advocate in its capital investments at suburban hospitals and urban facilities like Bethany.

The reason for the discrepancies is that Bethany serves a predominantly Black and minority community while the suburban hospitals serve a predominantly affluent white clientele, she said.

Mattie Holmes, resident leader for the South Austin Coalition (SAC), introduced the new coalition's "Proposed Community Benefits Agreement" with Advocate. The agreement called for all stakeholders having a voice, investments in Bethany comparable to investments made in suburban hospitals, and access to health care for all in the community.

James Thindwe, Executive Director of Jobs With Justice, reminded Advocate of its faith mission. "We deserve good treatment. We are human beings. We are all God's children," he said.

Also included in the proposed Agreement is the establishment of an oversight committee composed of Westside clergy, community leaders and labor groups, a conduct agreement with SEIU to protect workers' right to organize, a collaborative plan to upgrade Bethany with increased services, and a demand for better adherence by Advocate to its commitment to provide charity care to ease the overload at Mount Sinai and Stroger hospitals.

"We still have to make sure the disparities going on in our community are challenged. That's what we're trying to do with this Agreement," said Rev. Clarence Kelly, president of Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations -- West, and a Coalition member. "(Advocate) receives great tax breaks" for services it is suppose to provide but does not. "We need to get some of that," Rev. Kelly said.

Members of WHCC include the South Austin Coalition, The Morise Organization, Jobs With Justice, the Coalition of the Homeless, MAC --West, SEIU, and others. Banquet awardees included community activists and Advocate Bethany workers who have withstood harassment by management for their efforts to organize.

***For use of photo contact: Kristyne Peter, SEIU, 312-541-9566 ext. 18

South Austin Coalition Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations – West
Jobs with Justice Coalition for the Homeless