



Office of the
Ramsey County
Attorney



Office of the
Ramsey County
Sheriff



City of Saint Paul
Police
Department

April 12, 2022

Mr. James Hereford
President and CEO
Fairview Health Services
2450 Riverside Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55454

***Re: Concerns Over Planned Closure and/or Relocation of Mental Health Services
at St. Joseph's***

Dear Mr. Hereford:

We write to express our serious and timely concerns with the planned closure and/or relocation of mental health services at St. Joseph's and ask that you suspend any closure plans until an adequate plan is in place to provide for the safety and wellbeing of individuals with mental health symptoms and the community.

For 170 years, St. Joseph's Hospital has been an integral and essential part of our community and has compassionately and consistently provided care for our most vulnerable residents: individuals with mental illness and the families that care for them. As partners in our community's efforts to support those with mental illness, we are deeply concerned by the planned closure of mental health services at St. Joseph's Hospital.

As partners who encounter those with mental illness daily in our community, our law enforcement and correctional officers and civil commitment attorneys struggle to meet the safety and legal needs of those in crisis as well as the community. Having a local and stable mental health care facility partnership is critical to our success in managing these challenging and dynamic needs.

Although Fairview Health has stated that they plan to replace St. Joseph's inpatient mental health beds at some point in the future, there is no plan to replace them, except a small number, in the interim. Additionally, there remain concerning and unanswered questions about how these new services will be delivered.

To close these in-patient beds, without full replacement even for an interim period, would be devastating to our community. As things stand today, finding in-patient adult mental health beds is extremely difficult. Individuals who need mental health stabilization often find themselves languishing in the emergency rooms of local hospitals, with a wait time of up to several days.

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Having one third fewer Ramsey County/Saint Paul beds will lead to individuals being sent back out onto the street without adequate access to treatment and follow up services, further decompensating their already tenuous mental health. If a bed is deemed necessary, individuals will find themselves being sent to hospitals outside their community and as far away as Duluth, Rochester, or Fargo.

Without hospital stabilization, we are concerned more individuals will be brought to our jails with acute mental health symptoms. Being in the community with acute untreated mental health symptoms can result in behavior deemed criminal. Presently, there are dozens of in-custody individuals with mental health concerns waiting to be transferred to a state facility/hospital. We know that the longer a person with mental health symptoms spends in jail, the more their mental health and well-being deteriorates. Along with the serious impact on community safety, being charged with crimes adds to the challenges people with mental illness already face, and jail will only exacerbate symptoms.

We are also concerned about plans for the replacement of these beds. While Fairview Health has responded to some inquiries about the plans, questions and concerns remain. These include payment for those without private insurance and if there are limitations on admittance.

We strongly urge Fairview Health to reconsider current plans for closing St. Joseph's in-patient mental health unit to continue serving our vulnerable community members without interruption. We ask that whatever decision Fairview ultimately makes, that closure be delayed until adequate replacement beds are secured. We and other community partners are engaged in a robust dialogue about how, together, we can better serve our residents with mental illness.

Sincerely,



Trista MatasCastillo
Ramsey County Board Chair



John J. Choi
Ramsey County Attorney



Bob Fletcher
Ramsey County Sheriff



Todd Axtell
Saint Paul Chief of Police

cc: Board of Directors, Fairview Health Services
2450 Riverside Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55454