

# Citizen ACTION ILLINOIS

## FAX MEMORANDUM

TO: Courtney Avery 11-037

ORG: Illinois Health Facilities Board

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FROM: Edward Washington JUL 26 2011

RE: \_\_\_\_\_ HEALTH FACILITIES &  
SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

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Opposition Testimony for CON 11-037

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**CITIZEN ACTION/ILLINOIS TESTIMONY  
ILLINOIS HEALTH FACILITIES AND SERVICES REVIEW BOARD  
REGARDING OAK FOREST HOSPITAL CLOSURE**

(Tuesday July 26, 2011)

My name is William McNary and I am the Co-Director of Citizen Action/Illinois. Let me read three quotes:

“The reason we did this plan is so people don’t have to go to Stroger.”

“Surrounding health care facilities will absorb patients.”

“We have no specific knowledge of how the proposed project will affect other safety net services...response to the strategic plan has been substantially positive.”

Those words were from former Cook County Health and Hospital Systems CEO, William Foley. Today 90% of the patients who come to Oak Forest are being sent to Stroger. There is lack of support from the surrounding hospitals.

In testimony before both the Cook County Health and Hospital Systems Board as well as the Cook County Board of Commissioners, time after time and time and time again before many public hearings.

The patients and their advocates have said it. The providers have said it. The workers have said it. The local elected officials have said it. The advocates have said it. Some of the local ministers have said it. The community at large has said it. Even local hospital executives have said it before they unsaid it. And even you at the Illinois Health Facilities Board have said it not once, but twice.

That the Oak Forest Hospital closure plan would leave Cook county South Suburban residents without adequate access to intensive and long-term care beds, while at the same time further overburdening other area hospitals.

Research conducted by SEIU Local 73 indicates that in 2009, Oak Forest provided \$25 million in charity care. The three hospitals that say they are willing to take Oak Forest patients, South Suburban, Ingalls Memorial and Metro South provided only \$14 million combined. More than 26% of Oak Forest revenue was dedicated to charity care. South Suburban, Ingalls Memorial and Metro South were a combined 2%.

Ingalls Memorial, the only hospital that claim it could absorb all of Oak Forest patients had a bypass rate (the number of hours that the hospital goes on bypass and ambulances are diverted to other hospitals) two times higher than the state average.

For the past four years, Cook County has willfully and systematically slashed services at Oak Forest Hospital and now says the patient population is limited. If a storekeeper doesn’t stock his shelves, the customers who come into his store leave hungry and empty-

handed. And there is a tremendous hunger for comprehensive health care in south Cook County. It is one of the poorest areas in the nation. Study after study; often compare this area more to a developing country than the United States. Diabetes, heart disease, infant mortality, cancer, and violence statistics top the charts.

Experts indicate that over the last ten years, more than 2,000 hospital beds have been lost in this area. We often talk about the "food deserts" because of the lack of grocery stores in low-income areas. With this downsizing of patient services at Provident and Oak Forest, southern Cook County is on its way to becoming a "health desert". There is an often-quoted phrase, "if you build it, they will come." We believe that if you keep Oak Forest open, they will come.

Where your heart is so lay your treasure. If a budget is indeed a statement of values, it's time for us to reprioritize. While the current cash crunch will require budget trims and more efficiency in County government, abandoning the poor and sick in Cook County's most medically underserved area is simply not an option.

It's easy to cry poverty and not support the public health care system, if you don't use the public health care system. If we don't have the money, where did we find \$168 million in our capital budget to rehab the old Cook County Hospital, closed and unused for years, into administrative offices? What is the real value of the tens of millions that Cook County taxpayers are spending on high priced consultants paid to advise the health system? PricewaterhouseCoopers snagged up a \$50 million contract from Cook County Health Systems which pays the consultant \$150 an hour plus puts county liability for the bill as high as \$2.5 million a month. Chamberlin Edmonds Associates are getting up to \$38 million. Some of these millions would go a long way in providing quality healthcare to sick patients at Oak Forest.

Not that there hasn't been some progress. Indeed in a recent letter from President Preckwinkle, she has committed to adding an extra shift to the Urgent Care Center providing 24 hour services; providing increased patient access to cardiology, endocrinology, urology, and other preventative specialty care; the prospect of future outpatient surgery; as well as establishing a Southland Advisory Board to collaborate with the Health and Hospitals System moving forward.

At the first meeting of the President's Southland Advisory Board it was pointed out that there was a need for a trauma center in the south suburban area, and we plan to address this issue as well.

Citizen Action would also like the public to press state and county officials on a plan to use local hospitals for suburban patients instead of Stroger, where there are often long waits for medical treatment after the long trip to get there.

The mission of the Cook County Health and Hospitals System us to "provide integrated health services with dignity and respect regardless of a patient's ability to pay." We feel

that in order to meet its mission, the system needs to maintain and expand, not shrink and contract.

Yes, we should be cutting out corruption to ensure that taxpayers are getting the biggest bang for our limited health care resources. Yes, we should make sure that our collection procedures secure public money from Medicaid as well as private payers.

All too often, the Cook County Health and Hospitals System Board try to operate using a business model. It looks at existing and shrinking revenues and tries to figure out how to cut services. Businesses naturally cut its supply and its workers as the demand for its products or services decrease. Government, on the other hand must expand its services as the need for services increase.

The independent board should be driven by its central mission that everyone gets health care regardless of their ability to pay. If Cook County was a private hospital system and their goal was to maximize revenues, that's a different mission. But a public hospital must stay true to its mission, even if it means raising revenue, not reducing access to needed healthcare.

Lastly, the state of Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board twice denied the closing of Oak Forest Hospital citing:

"The proposed closure will increase the number of intensive care and long term care beds needed in the planning area."

"While the hospitals in the planning area have stated that they would accommodate the inpatient workload of Oak Forest Hospital, there has been no indication by hospitals in the planning area assuming the outpatient workload at Oak Forest Hospital."

"The proposed discontinuation of services will increase the number of ICU and Long Term Care beds in the planning areas and it is also unclear how the residents will have access to care should the proposed Regional Outpatient Center not be funded by the county."

The Board concluded: "given the large number of safety net patients Oak Forest Hospital provides service for; it does not appear that the proposed discontinuation will have an adverse impact on access to care in the service area."

If these conclusions have not changed, the decision should not change.  
Thank You,



William McNary  
Co-Director, Citizen Action of Illinois