

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

PUBLIC HEARING

May 23, 2013 - 5 PM

A Public Hearing on ***Procedural Resolution No. 10-2013***

Was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium

Of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building,

725 Veterans Memorial Highway,

Smithtown, New York

Present:

Legislator DuWayne Gregory - Acting Chair/District Office #15

Legislator Lou D'Amaro - District Office #17

Legislator Tom Barraga - District Office #11

Tim Laube - Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature

Christina DeLisi - Aide to Legislator Schneiderman

Pam Donovan - Aide to Legislator Anker

Kevin McEvaddy - AME/Legislative Aide

Kevin Williams - AME/3rd Vice-President

Don Dailey - AME/4th Vice-President

Michael Serratore - Elsie Owens Health Center

Sister Margaret Smyth - Hudson River Health Care

Dr. Jeff Steigman - Family Service League, Inc.

Catherine Casey - East Hampton Housing Authority

Joan Sommermeyer - New York State Nurses Association

Joanna Solmonsohn - New York State Nurse Association

Minutes Taken by:

Alison Mahoney - Court Reporter

*(*The hearing was called to order at 5:13 P.M. *)*

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Good evening, folks. Thank you for coming to tonight's hearing, public hearing on the consolidation of the East Hampton and Southampton Health Clinics. If you all would please rise for a moment for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Barraga.

Salutation

Okay. We have several cards. I'm going to invite Michael Serratore.

MR. SERRATORE:

Yes.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Please come forward. Everyone has three minutes.

MR. SERRATORE:

Hi. My name is Michael Serratore, I'm a longtime resident of Port Jefferson Village. I wanted to come here to express my gratitude and support of the Elsie Owens Health Center in Coram.

Life has changed dramatically for me in the last couple of years. I would never have anticipated needing to use the services a few short years ago. I won't bore you with the details, but I've euphemistically come to describe these last few years as my time of Job. One of the results of that is I no longer have health benefits. I've been quite reluctant, honestly, to go to the doctor for fear of what I might ultimately find and have to deal with in the way of medication, what have you. I had to go for a physical in regard to an employment opportunity and it was found that I had diabetes and I have been put on medication, what have you.

So, you know, I was very pleasantly surprised with regard to what the fee was I had to pay, in regard to what the medications would cost me going forward. I have two small children and I'm just grateful and I hope that nothing will occur that these services would be taken away for the working class population that is feeling the pinch. So, thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Thank you and good luck to you.

MR. SERRATORE:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Next we have Sister Margaret Smyth. Good evening, Sister Margaret. It's been a few years. Good evening.

SISTER SMYTH:

It has.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Good evening. Thank you for coming.

SISTER SMYTH:

Thank you very much. My name is Sister Margaret Smith and I'm here this evening both as a member of the Advisory Board of Hudson Health Care, and I also sit as a member of the Advisory

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Board at one of the County clinics and this has given me great insight into both sides of the situation and picture.

I commend all the County clinics for the great work that they do. But I also have seen the difficulties and challenges that they face with Civil Service positions not being able to be filled due to cutbacks, with all the other difficulties that they encounter with buildings and everything. When you started this evening, you said something very wonderful; you said, "*The salvation of the Southampton and East Hampton Clinics.*" Salvation sometimes comes with change, and if we can bring about the enhancement of medical care that can be offered to all the patients that need it, then that's what we should be about.

I speak in favor of Hudson because I have seen how they have done wonders in coming in to support, enhance and help everybody that comes across their way. So I invite the Legislature and people that are involved to dig deep on both sides and to think that what is the best thing that we can do for the outcome of the patients that we serve. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Thank you. Next we have Dr. Jeff Steigman? Steigman?

MR. STEIGMAN:

Steigman. Good evening. My name is Dr. Jeff Steigman, I am the Vice-President for Integrated Health Care at Family Service League. Our Executive Director, Karen Bohrstein, would have been here personally but she's out of the country. So I want to just briefly make a couple of comments about our experience with Hudson River Health Care. And although it's not an extensive history, it's been quite a positive one.

From the outset, we've been impressed with their professionalism, their willingness to collaborate their strong infrastructure, their knowledge and their focus on the mission of providing quality and high -- you know, high quality health care to some of the most vulnerable individuals. And they do this with a vision as well in terms of integration, so we're very encouraged by the fact that they're looking to bridge the gap between primary health care as well as behavioral health care as well as their focus on outcomes and their successes to date.

When they first came on the scene in Long Island, you know, we did our homework. We didn't know much about them. And we called Executive Directors of other family service agencies in their area, Hudson -- you know, in the Hudson River/Westchester area, and we were pleasantly surprised that the feedback was very consistent with what we're saying right now in terms of how positive and how great they are to partner with. So we really hope that you will strongly consider providing your support to Hudson River. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay, thank you. Next is Kevin Williams.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Hello, gentlemen. Kevin Williams, I'm the 3rd Vice-President of AME. I'm here tonight because I'm concerned with this consolidation and how it's going to affect our members, our community who are members in our community who serve our community. How is this plan going to affect them? We haven't seen anything in writing as to whether they're going to be kept, whether they're going to be laid off, and that's my concern as an AME member, as the 3rd Vice-President. Can anyone give me an idea of how that's going to happen? Is there anything in writing? I just was wondering that I've asked that question.

LEG. BARRAGA:

The media.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Right, yeah. We personally haven't seen anything yet, but it's our understanding that there are roughly 20 employees, that they're going to be split between the Riverhead Health Center as well as Tri-Community Health Center.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Okay. Well, that's my position. We're here to support our members. We oppose the consolidation of the clinics into Riverhead.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And my -- that's also my understanding, just for the record.

MR. WILLIAMS:

So no one will be laid off?

LEG. D'AMARO:

And there's -- I have not heard of any discussion at all about any layoffs. And I've been hearing the same thing that Legislator Gregory has indicated and, frankly, I think that's the way it should play out. And I agree with you about asking to see something in writing and, you know, I'd be happy to -- to the extent that I'm involved in any type of negotiation or this plan, I agree with you on that.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Okay. Thank you.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay?

LEG. BARRAGA:

And just for the record, I agree with my two colleagues. I have not heard anything in terms of layoffs. My understanding was that the employees of that particular clinic would be assimilated in other clinics. They would not lose their jobs.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Would you oppose layoffs if that was put on the table?

LEG. BARRAGA:

I have never seen --

MR. WILLIAMS:

If the future it was to come down to -- would you guys oppose layoffs?

LEG. BARRAGA:

In the past, when there were layoffs, I opposed them.

MR. WILLIAMS:

Okay. Thank you, gentlemen.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. Catherine Casey.

MS. CASEY:

Good evening. Catherine Casey, I'm the Executive Director of the East Hampton Housing Authority. I am here to try to speak for the people who utilize the East Hampton Satellite Clinic.

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From our perspective, the consolidation puts an emphasis on efficiency and that is at the cost of accessibility. Having a beefed up clinic with expanded services in Southampton frankly does little to serve the East Hampton community. It took me 45 minutes to get from East Hampton Village to County Road 39, and it's not Memorial Day yet. The clinic in East Hampton saw more traffic previously. I can't say why the patient roster has decreased, but I can tell you that there are four walk-in clinics in East Hampton, two of them are part of the Meeting House Lane, Southampton Hospital Network, and the copay to walk in the door is \$40; at the Suffolk County Clinic, it's 15. For prenatal care patients that have to travel from East Hampton to Southampton twice a week, it's a hardship.

The care providers in East Hampton currently don't have the resources they need to absorb those patients that will not be able to use the East Hampton Clinic. The -- I've spoken to one of the physicians who said his greatest challenge is recruiting talent and getting them to stay so that they don't have turnover with their staff. I understand that the HEAL Grant, Health Care Efficiency and Accessibility Law grant that's being used to consolidate these two clinics, is a Capital fund. And from what I've gleaned, the renovations of the old nursing home on the Southampton Hospital Campus is going to be approximately two-and-a-half million. So I don't know what the Legislature's plans or intentions are with those other funds, but if some of them could be directed out east, it's sorely needed.

Housing -- I don't know if housing can be a component in this grant, if any of these monies can be used to acquire property. I've spoken to the East Hampton Town Board, they're very interested in keeping services out east. They, I'm sure, would entertain some kind of a proposal whereby the town provides the land, and perhaps the grant funds can be used to create a residence for health care providers out east if they were to make, say, for example, a two-year commitment to stay at the Montauk Clinic which is part of the hospital system, or the Amagansett Clinic. They're privately owned and operated, but they're participating providers, and part of the Meeting House Lane Associates that comes under Southampton Hospital. I know I'm running out of time, I'm sorry.

Additionally, I met with the President of Southampton Hospital and they've already signed a letter of intent to merge with Stony Brook University. Once that's done, they're going to move the hospital further west to the old LIU campus, that adds 20 minutes to the travel time for patients. So we have a paucity of health care providers out east and closing the clinic exacerbates that. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Thank you for your testimony. Don Dailey?

MR. DAILEY:

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

My name is Don Dailey, I'm a proud member of Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees and I represent the hard working men and women that make their livings at the Suffolk County Health Centers.

There's been a lot of talk in recent days as to the level of care that will be provided by Hudson River Health Care at the newly proposed Southampton Center. The FQHC may have some advantages, but there are also some drawbacks. Not everyone that needs these facilities will have transportation to get there. And while there may be some grant somewhere in the future for bus service, would it not be a good idea to have that transportation issue in the bank, so to speak, before inflicting any hardship on the people that would be using these facilities?

It is widely known that our health centers deal with some of the poorest people in the County. Many of these people do not have Social Security numbers and will not have the \$75 or more needed for fees that will be -- they will be charged for if they have not applied for Medicaid or if they have applied for Medicaid and have been turned down. How many patients will leave without the

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care that they need and what will be the impact on that person, their family and the community?

While a financial -- while the national financial crisis has people all over the country struggling to make ends meet, the people of Suffolk County struggle even more as we have some of the highest taxes and utility rates in the country. In addition to our concerns about the consolidation of the East End Health Centers, we are against the resolution to issue bonds in the estimated value of close to \$5 million for the repair and beautification of the Brentwood center. While the repair and restoration of a County building should be viewed as a good thing, it should be made clear to the taxpayers who these renovations are being done for. Hudson River has been in and out of the Tri-Community Health Center taking measurements for their takeover of that facility for some time now. So to say that there's cause for a concern is not an understatement. Is Suffolk County going to spend close to \$5 million to renovate a facility that they plan to hand over to somebody else? That's something that the public needs to know.

While there are not proposed layoffs associated with the East End move, the remaining health center workers remain in fear for their jobs. This realistic fear is due to an Administration that seems bent on privatization as a means to address the financial woes of the County. What is the plan for the remaining health centers? What is the Administration planning to do to the men and women that work in these facilities? One thing remains clear, our workers are second-to-none and the unfair burden of saving the County from financial ruins remains unfairly on their weary shoulders. Please consider the price paid by our workers in recent days before we hurt them any further. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay, thank you. And Joan Sommermeyer?

MS. SOMMERMEYER:

Yes.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay.

MS. SOMMERMEYER:

Good evening, everybody. Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Joan Sommermeyer, I am from the New York State Nurses Association representing over 37,000 nurses in this great State of ours, the oldest and largest organization for Registered Nurses in the country.

The County's desire to balance the budget by getting out of the health care business is legally and morally wrong. Concerns over this proposal include problems with privatizing health care. When health care becomes profit-driven, it certainly affects patient care. The County Charter requires certain health care services be provided. It's morally wrong to risk the health care of the public, especially to the most vulnerable population.

I agree with the gentleman that spoke earlier saying that there's a need for a written plan, and without this clear plan, there's no understanding as to what the desire of the County is to be with providing the necessary services to populations in need, the underserved populations. Why not keep the business in Suffolk County and grow the County rather than sending the money outside the County up to Westchester? There are so many individuals that are residents of Suffolk County that strive to earn a living in the health centers and providing services to the much needed -- to the population that needs the health care the most, the vulnerable population. Why not investigate the possibility of selling the Article 28 license to current hospitals, investigating other ways to generate revenues in the health care centers?

I respectfully request that you provide written documentation as to the -- how funds are generated through these -- through the clinics and keep the business in Suffolk County. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Great. Thank you.

That's all the cards that we have. Is there anyone else that hadn't had the opportunity to speak that would like to speak? I know I saw a couple of folks walk in.

LEG. D'AMARO:

That's it.

ACTING CHAIRMAN GREGORY:

Okay. You all voiced very meaningful suggestions and questions and certainly, once we have the transcript, we'll relay those concerns to the Health Department. This is the second of two public hearings on this matter, so there will be no more public hearings but the matter will be before the Legislature at the June 4th meeting and you all have the opportunity to voice your concerns then as well. And we thank you for coming out tonight and participating in this process. We stand adjourned. Thank you.

*(*The hearing was adjourned at 5:33 PM*)*