

Good Morning,

I would like to begin by thanking the committee, for permitting me to speak today. My name is David Schusteric and I'm standing here today as a member of the Community in opposition to the closure of Mercy Hospital & Medical Center.

President Barack Obama once said, "*Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*" With this in mind, it's up to us today to not only stand up for Mercy, but to stand up to social inequalities and health disparities within the Southside of Chicago. Shutting down Mercy will only amplify these imbalances by further creating a healthcare desert, to a community already suffering from healthcare injustice, and it would simply be inhumane.

The fact we are even speaking about shutting down a hospital during the worst pandemic since the Spanish Flu is just cruel, foolish, and senseless. If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it's that black and brown communities suffer the worst during a healthcare crisis. Yet, instead of fighting together to end this pandemic as a community, we're here talking about closing the first hospital of Chicago, which has consistently served the underprivileged for over 168 years.

I have read all 238 pages of closure information, provided to the committee by Mercy Hospital, as well as all 128 pages from Mercy's 2019 Community Health Assessment and strongly call BS. This is not about serving the community, but about corporate self-indulgence. When Trinity Health acquired Mercy, they knew the financial restraints. At the end of FY20, Trinity reported an operating revenue of 18.8 billion, and only had a reported loss of 2.4% from the previous year--- during a pandemic (Trinity Health, 2020).

Of the information provided to the committee, Mercy provides limited detail about their outpatient model. Their own Health Assessment shows Mental Health is the number one need for the Southside of Chicago, yet Mercy is ignoring to include this in their new model, even when they're reporting an increase of inpatient mental health visits. This Pandemic has not been easy on any of us. I'm sure majority of us are feeling anxiety or have signs of depression due to our new normal. It's disgraceful that Trinity isn't including these clear details about how they would close the facility, if regular services would be

provided, or what the true future will hold. On top of all of this, Trinity had attempted to open up one of these facilities in another state and it failed, resulting in the closure of the facility (Modern Healthcare, 2019).

If Mercy closed and moved to an outpatient model, over 1700 jobs could be lost, in an economy already hit hard by Covid-19, and Trinity would profit off the sales of Mercy's prime real estate, while the employees and patients would agonize the magnitudes. *"Success isn't about how much money you make, it's the difference you make in people's lives."* (Michelle Obama) The staff at Mercy make a difference every damn day to impact the lives of those underserved and they deserve better than this.

However, I agree Mercy does suffer losses month after month, particularly due to the patient population it serves, the uninsured and Medicaid patients. Mercy does need some form of assistance, from the State of Illinois, in order to provide the services desperately needed for the community to survive. All it takes is one-step, to change a life, everyone deserves affordable healthcare, close to home.

Instead of closing, the State of Illinois should provide assistance for Mercy to rebuild, at the old hospital site, which is currently owned by Mercy. The new facility should still be a full hospital but with a downsized inpatient model and expanded outpatient services. This can be easily done, but Trinity needs to stop being gluttonous and start truly living up to Mercy's own mission and values and give a damn about the community. Stop closing hospitals in black and brown communities that don't have services nearby to replace them.

I believe we should be talking about amending Administrative Code 1100.510(d), which defines a hospital market area for facilities located in Chicago and surrounding counties, as a radius of 10 miles. In 2003, my father was involved in a car accident just outside of Starved Rock. The nearest hospital was 10.1 miles away, which is approximately 19 minutes in LaSalle County. My father died at the hospital that evening and at 12 years old, I was fatherless, and I felt as if I grew up overnight. This situation led me to work in hospital management because I couldn't stand to see how healthcare was changing. 10 miles is life or death, especially in a city that's filled with constant construction and traffic.

In closing, the late Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, “*Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.*” I hope that you join me and prevent this closure from happening. We can do better than this. We have to do better than this. Mercy is not finished. Mercy is only just getting started.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom left.

David Schusteric, MBA