

CHERI BUSTOS
17TH DISTRICT, ILLINOIS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1317

September 3, 2020

Courtney Avery
Administrator
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 W. Jefferson St., Second Floor
Springfield, IL 62761

Dear Administrator Avery:

I write to express concern regarding Meryhealth's request to close the 20-bed acute mental illness category of service at Javon Bea Hospital-Rockton Avenue in Rockford, Illinois.

As you know, Mercyhealth is authorized to operate a 20-bed mental health inpatient unit at Javon Bea Hospital-Rockton Avenue, which they are seeking to permanently close. Currently the unit is not open and not serving the public reportedly due to staffing issues. My office has heard directly from Rockford elected officials, health care providers and members of the public expressing concern over the closure of this unit.

For instance, SwedishAmerican Health System in Rockford has informed my office that they do not have the capacity at their mental health inpatient unit to meet the increasing mental health demand after the Mercyhealth unit closure. "Since Mercyhealth stopped their services we're now averaging 18 patients every day in the unit, which puts us at 90 percent capacity. In addition, our emergency department has already seen an increase in adult mental health patient visits per month, with an average of 400 growing to 450." They continue, "[i]f those numbers continue to rise, we will get to a point where we reach capacity and will not be able to care for human beings who come to us for help."

In addition, in communication unrelated to the Mercy closure, my office has heard directly from other health care providers that cases of mental illness are rising in the Rockford community and will likely continue to rise. Such increases are occurring on the national level as well. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, "during late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use."¹

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

Further, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll conducted in late July, “53% of adults in the United States reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to worry and stress over the coronavirus. This is significantly higher than the 32% reported in March, the first time this question was included in KFF polling. Many adults are also reporting specific negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, such as difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus.”²

Given these concerns, I request that full consideration be given to the negative impact this closure could have on the Rockford community. Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheri Bustos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress

² <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>