

January, 21, 2022

Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board:

This testimony is concerning the closure of the Javon Bea Hospital on Rockton Avenue by Mercy Health Corporation. I sincerely believe that the closure of the only hospital on the west side of Rockford, Illinois will negatively impact my family and many other families.

My husband, Randal Cook, and I bought a home in southwest Rockford in 1991. We have enjoyed a good standard of living with most of the amenities expected in an urban location. One of the things I have appreciated is the eight-minute drive from my house to Rockford Memorial Hospital, now renamed after Javon Bea. I know that it is eight minutes because, in 1996 I drove my eleven-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, to the RMH emergency room after she fell into a campfire, suffering second and third-degree burns. The emergency staff were exemplary in the treatment of Elizabeth and thorough in their instructions for aftercare. Today Elizabeth has not one burn scar from her experience. This is only one example of several emergency room visits over the years.

Let's fast-forward to the present. My husband had random chest pains in September 2021. Our insurance carrier at the time, Aetna, has a co-pay of \$450.00 for emergency room visits that we cannot afford so I drove him to the site of Rockford Clinic on Rockton Avenue. We discovered that Mercy had shuttered the clinic and there was no recourse but to drive to the MercyHealth Urgent Care facility on Perryville Road, another 20 minutes away on the far east side. They did some testing and sent him home. Six hours later they called back and pleaded for him to go to the MercyHealth Emergency Room at Perryville Road and Riverside Blvd. This is the absolute farthest diagonal point in the city from our house on Montague Road. After a night's stay and thousands of dollars of debt, my cardiologist determined that Randy had a hernia. It was extremely an anxious event for us trying to get across town, then taking the highway and toll road around Rockford to get to the MercyHealth Emergency room and hospital.

Because we do not feel safe with MercyHealth closing the westside emergency room and clinic at the west Rockford location, we have moved our medical care away from MercyHealth, except for my cardiologist, Dr. Leela Narra. She has saved my life more than once and she is not at fault.

It would be easy to say, "There, switching to UW Swedish American fixed all that, so where's the problem? The problem is that Mercy Health and Javon Bea, himself, lied when they promised to not close the Rockton Avenue facilities. Mercy is Machiavellian in methodology, announcing in a slow, calculating manner that the westside clinic will close, then the Physician's Building, then only an emergency room doctor on call, then the mental health facilities closed, then no more surgeries, then the emergency room shuts down completely. Mercy is attempting to boil the frog in the pot one degree at a time. Mercy disrespects the citizens of west Rockford by determining that we are not valuable enough to keep healthy and alive. All this in the name of greed. Mercy acquired Rockford Health Systems and built a monument to themselves on the north-east pinnacle of Rockford bordering I-90 to gain suburban Chicago business, not to benefit the citizens who need and deserve healthcare.

West Rockford is a food desert, and now, a healthcare desert.

Please, please stop Mercy Health and Javon Bea from benefitting from their deceit to the citizens of Rockford.

Respectfully submitted,

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