

STATE OF ILLINOIS
HEALTH FACILITIES AND SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

IN RE:)
)
Proposed project (#E-019-24))
)
Ascension St. Joseph Hospital,)
Joliet, Illinois)

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

held at the Public Hearing on the proposed project known as Project (E-019-24), Ascension St. Joseph Hospital, Joliet, Illinois, held at the Billie Limacher Bicentennial Park and Theatre, 201 Jefferson Street, Joliet, Illinois, on Friday, September 6, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

MR. GEORGE ROATE - Program Reviewer
MR. MIKE CONSTANTINO - Senior Program Reviewer
MS. BLANCA R. DOMINGUEZ - Legal Counsel
MR. JOHN KNIERY - Board Administrator
MS. SHARIE RYAN - Board Administrative Assistant
MS. DEBRA SAVAGE - Board Chairwoman

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1 MR. ROATE: Good afternoon. My name is George
2 Roate. I am accompanied by Ms. Debra Savage, Board
3 Chairwoman, Mr. John Kniery, Board Administrator,
4 Ms. Blanca Dominguez, Board Legal Counsel, Mr. Mike
5 Constantino, Board Senior Reviewer, and Sharie Ryan,
6 Board Administrative Assistant. We are from the Illinois
7 Department of Public Health and represent the Illinois
8 Health Facilities and Services Review Board. We are here
9 to conduct a public hearing on the proposed project know
10 as Exemption E-019-24, Ascension St. Joseph Medical
11 Center, Joliet.

12 As per the rules of the Illinois Health
13 Facilities and Services Review Board, I would like to
14 read the legal notice into the record. Prime HealthCare
15 Services, Incorporated, is purchasing Ascension
16 St. Joseph Medical Center located at 333 North Madison
17 Street, Joliet, at a cost of \$71,104,224. This
18 transaction is germane with Prime HealthCare,
19 Incorporated's proposal to purchase nine hospitals and
20 two ambulatory surgery treatment centers located
21 throughout the Metropolitan Chicago area at a total cost
22 of approximately \$375 million.

23 The public hearing will take place
24 pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Illinois Compiled Statute

1 3960. The hearing is scheduled for Friday, September 6th
2 from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Billie Limacher
3 Bicentennial Park and Theatre, 201 Jefferson Street,
4 Joliet.

5 The public hearing is to be held by the
6 Illinois Department of Public Health pursuant to the
7 Illinois Health Facilities Planning Act. The hearing is
8 open to the public and will afford an opportunity for
9 parties with interest to present written and/or verbal
10 comment relevant to the project. All allegations or
11 assertions should be relevant to the need for the
12 proposed project and be supported with two copies of
13 documentation or materials that are printed or typed on
14 paper sized 8 1/2 by 11 inches.

15 Consideration by the State Board has been
16 tentatively scheduled for the October 29, 2024, Illinois
17 Health Facilities and Services Review Board meeting. If
18 you have not done so, please sign in using the
19 appropriate registration forms. One form is for
20 individuals who wish to provide testimony either in favor
21 or in opposition to the project. Another form -- the
22 second form is for individuals to register their
23 attendance who do not wish to testify.

24 To ensure that the Illinois Health

1 Facilities and Services Review Board's public hearings
2 protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of
3 an individual's health information, covered entities as
4 defined by the Health Insurance Portability Act of 1996,
5 such as facilities, hospital providers, health plans and
6 healthcare clearinghouses submitting oral or written
7 testimony that discloses protected health information of
8 individuals shall have a valid written authorization from
9 that individual. The authorization shall allow the
10 covered entity to share the individual's protected health
11 information at this hearing.

12 Those of you who came with prepared text
13 for your presentation, may chose to submit that text
14 without giving testimony. However, if you're giving oral
15 testimony, please be as brief as possible. As per the
16 legal notice, I would appreciate two copies of your
17 testimony. When you make your presentation, please give
18 the court reporter the correct spelling of your complete
19 name. If there -- we do have a chief spokesperson
20 identified, and she will make the first presentation.

21 At this time, the Board would like to
22 call Ms. Polly Davenport.

23 MS. DAVENPORT: Good afternoon. Polly
24 Davenport. P-o-l-l-y. D-a-v-e-n-p-o-r-t. Hello,

1 everyone. I'm the Chief Executive Officer for Ascension
2 Illinois. I would like to first thank the Illinois
3 Health Facilities Services and Review Board for the
4 opportunity to speak with you here today on behalf of our
5 Ascension Illinois hospitals.

6 I'm happy to share with you all how we
7 came to this decision to transfer ownership of nine of
8 our fourteen hospitals to Prime HealthCare. In order to
9 ensure our mission of serving those most vulnerable
10 continues to flourish, we continue to explore new options
11 to best serve our communities as we adapt to the rapidly
12 changing healthcare environment.

13 After thorough due diligence, a value
14 compatibility assessment and an ethics discernment
15 process, Ascension selected Prime HealthCare as the best
16 steward of these facilities for our future.

17 Prime HealthCare is well-positioned to
18 serve our communities through an integrated care delivery
19 system to ensure that the greater Chicago area has a
20 sustainable quality healthcare access for generations to
21 come. Thank you.

22 MR. ROATE: Thank you.

23 Next, the Board would like to call
24 Mr. Fred Ortega.

1 MR. ORTEGA: Thank you. Fred Ortega. F-r-e-d.
2 O-r-t-e-g-a, and my title is Director of Government
3 Relations for Prime HealthCare. I want to start by
4 thanking Chair Savage and Administrator Kniery and the
5 Board staff for once again organizing these very
6 important meetings and inviting us to speak to you and to
7 the public.

8 I am speaking on behalf of Prime
9 HealthCare, of course, and we consider it an honor and
10 tremendous responsibility to have been selected by
11 Ascension Health as the stewards of its Illinois
12 facilities, including St. Joseph here in Joliet, their
13 employees and patients, and their combined legacy of
14 service to their communities.

15 Prime HealthCare was founded in 2001 with
16 a mission of saving, improving and investing in community
17 hospitals. We have since delivered on that mission
18 growing into an integrated delivery system, including 44
19 hospitals in 14 states, more than 300 outpatient
20 locations, and nearly 45,000 employees and physicians.

21 We are excited to welcome the Ascension
22 facilities into our Prime HealthCare family, and we
23 strongly believe that we are uniquely positioned to serve
24 these hospitals and their communities to ensure that the

1 greater Chicago area continues to have sustainable
2 quality healthcare access far into the future. We have
3 done this for communities across the nation, and we are
4 confident that we could deliver for the residents of
5 Chicagoland and beyond.

6 It is Prime HealthCare's unwavering
7 dedication to providing compassionate quality care,
8 building value, preserving access and improving health
9 outcomes that allows us to consistently be nationally
10 ranked among the best hospital systems in the nation.
11 Prime HealthCare has been named a top 10 and top 15
12 health system by Truven Health Analytics. Our hospitals
13 have been named among the nations 100 top hospitals 69
14 times and have received more patient safety awards from
15 Healthgrades than any other health system in the past
16 eight years.

17 In 2023 alone, we've received more than
18 500 clinical quality awards from national organizations,
19 such as the Leapfrog Group, U.S. News and World Report,
20 and many more. Prime has also been recognized as a top
21 10 health system in the nation by the Lown Institute with
22 A grades for health equity, social responsibility,
23 patient and clinical outcomes, and inclusivity.

24 Prime HealthCare is not only bringing

1 this commitment to quality and health equity to the
2 Ascension Illinois facilities. We have also committed to
3 investing \$250 million in the Ascension facilities to
4 fund capital improvements, including substantial
5 technology investments and system upgrades as well as
6 hiring all of the acquired facilities' workforce subject
7 to Prime's standard hiring practices, policies and
8 titles.

9 Prime HealthCare is also committed to
10 continuing all services at St. Joseph Joliet and hope to
11 expand services based on community needs. We have also
12 committed to maintaining levels of charity care and
13 continuing existing charity care and community benefit
14 programs preserving these facilities roles as valued
15 community partners. This is not an exceptional
16 commitment. It is what we do for all the communities
17 that we serve. In fact, Prime HealthCare has provided
18 more than \$12 billion in charity care and community
19 benefits since 2010, and nearly \$2 billion in capital
20 improvements since 2005 to transform hospitals and ensure
21 health equity and care in communities across the country.

22 Since 2001, Prime HealthCare has also
23 rescued various catholic hospitals respecting the
24 traditions of these historic facilities while promoting

1 the spiritual care and well-being of all members of the
2 community, including the most vulnerable on the margins
3 of society. We pledge to do this for the Ascension
4 facilities as well.

5 I want to close with the words of our
6 founder. If you could see the potential for good, feel
7 the impact of kindness on others, touch the spirit of a
8 generous cause just a bit every day, then you have
9 embarked on a noble path. This perfectly encapsulates
10 the dedication to compassionate care and social
11 responsibility at the heart of Prime HealthCare's
12 mission. We look forward to sharing that dedication to
13 caring and improving our communities with all the
14 patients who depend on these hospitals and facilities for
15 generations to come. Thank you so much.

16 MR. ROATE: Next, the Board would like to call
17 Damon Zdunich.

18 MR. ZDUNICH: Hello, my name is Damon Zdunich
19 from Joliet. You were close.

20 MR. ROATE: My apologies.

21 MR. ZDUNICH: That's all right. I just --

22 THE COURT REPORTER: Excuse me, can you spell
23 your name, please?

24 MR. ZDUNICH: Yes, I can. It's D-a-m-o-n.

1 Last name is Z-d-u-n-i-c-h.

2 And I just wanted to share my
3 observations. I'm a lifelong Joliet citizen. I remember
4 the history of St. Joe's as being a stellar hospital. I
5 remember the investments they made in the community from
6 the early '90s through I want to say about 2005. Was
7 that 300 million? Was it 350 million? It was very
8 substantial investments they made to provide great
9 healthcare for Joliet citizens.

10 Joliet is the third largest city in
11 Illinois, and it deserves great hospitals. St. Joe's,
12 like I said, just briefly, was a stellar hospital. At
13 one time it was I believe a chronic -- not just chronic
14 care but it was a Level 1 trauma center. I'm going to
15 say that was in the mid '90s. It hasn't been what it
16 was. I think it first got bought out probably 15 years
17 ago by one network of hospitals. Then it changed hands a
18 few years later. And then it changed hands again to
19 Ascension I think two years ago. That didn't turn out so
20 well. We saw a lot of strikes in the community and a lot
21 of management labor issues, and we don't need that in
22 Joliet. It's not good for the long term.

23 And then I heard about the sale I think
24 it was July 24th or 25th. I saw it was to Prime.

1 St. Joe's had always been a non-profit hospital. They
2 sold it to Prime Hospital out of California. And I spent
3 a little time on the web, and I know that's -- the web
4 isn't always the best source of information. So if I'm
5 incorrect on any of this, all I would ask the Board is to
6 look a little deeper.

7 In my brief review of Prime, I think I
8 saw a settlement for \$65 million for overcharging in
9 2018, I think. If I'm -- Prime could correct me if I'm
10 wrong on this stuff. In 2021, there's a settlement for
11 kickbacks of whistleblower. Attorney Generals got
12 involved. That was a \$37 million settlement. In 2022,
13 they had some labor, quote, "violations." 2022, they
14 also had some EEOC violations in New Jersey. And I think
15 in 2023, there was a pension lawsuit. You know, I don't
16 like bringing that up. I don't like throwing rocks at
17 any organization, but I do think there's a difference
18 between non-for-profit healthcare and for-profit
19 healthcare.

20 In today's Wall Street Journal, the
21 California senate passed a bill to clamp down on private
22 equity healthcare -- healthcare deals, I should say.
23 Lawmakers are concerned that private-equity investment
24 may be increasing medical costs as several studies have

1 concluded. That's direct quotes from the The Wall Street
2 Journal article.

3 Like I said, they're going to spend 250
4 million on nine hospitals. That's -- when I look back on
5 what St. Joe's, what the nuns spent over the past 25
6 years, it's worse, that 25 million -- or 250 million. I
7 don't really mind. It's not a big concern of mine if
8 Prime buys all the other hospitals. I care about Joliet,
9 and I want to ensure that Joliet citizens are taken care
10 of at a reasonable price. I hope our local elected
11 officials dig a little bit deeper and look into Prime and
12 maybe ask why Northwestern, maybe Loyola, and other
13 non-profits can't look into buying our St. Joe's
14 Hospital. I would even ask -- I don't know if many of
15 you know the history, Mayo Clinic was founded by a nun
16 from Joliet, Illinois. Maybe even look at Mayo Clinic.
17 That's all I have to say. Thank you.

18 MR. ROATE: Thank you.

19 Next, the Board would like to call
20 Ms. Barbara Martin.

21 MS. MARTIN: In the closing comments, I'm Barb
22 Martin, the CEO of St. Joe's. We thank the Board for
23 providing us the opportunity to hear from our community
24 today during the public hearing and look forward to

1 appearing before the Board in October. Their support of
 2 this transfer of ownership preserves the jobs and ensures
 3 needed healthcare access across Chicagoland as well as
 4 investments in Illinois for the future. Thank you to the
 5 Board and all that are here. Thank you.

6 THE COURT REPORTER: Could you spell your name?

7 MS. MARTIN: M-a-r-t-i-n, Barbara.

8 THE COURT REPORTER: Thank you.

9 MR. ROATE: Is there anyone who wishes to
 10 testify who has not had an opportunity? Seeing none. Is
 11 there anyone who wishes to testify -- who wishes to
 12 provide additional testimony?

13 I would remind everyone to submit your
 14 written comments to us so that we have this information
 15 for the record. Also, this project is scheduled for
 16 consideration by the Illinois Health Facilities and
 17 Services Review Board at its October 29, 2024 meeting.
 18 This meeting will be held at the Bolingbrook Golf Club,
 19 2001 Rodeo Drive, Bolingbrook, Illinois. The public has
 20 until October 9th, 2024, to submit written comments.
 21 These comments can be sent to my attention at the
 22 Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board care
 23 of the Illinois Department of Public Health, 525 West
 24 Jefferson Street, 2nd floor, Springfield, Illinois 62761.

1 If you prefer, you may email your comments. Our email
2 address is DPH.HFSRB@Illinois.gov.

3 Are there any questions? Seeing there
4 are no additional questions or comments, I deem this
5 public hearing adjourned. Thank you.

6 (Which were all the proceedings had
7 at the above-entitled matter on
8 this date.)

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1 STATE OF ILLINOIS)

) SS:

2 COUNTY OF W I L L)

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4 I, Deborah A. Rannells, CSR, a certified
5 shorthand reporter in the State of Illinois, do hereby
6 certify that the above matter was recorded
7 stenographically by me and reduced to writing by me.

8 I FURTHER CERTIFY that the foregoing
9 transcript of the said matter is a true, correct, and
10 complete transcript of the proceedings at the time and
11 place specified herein before.

12 I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative or
13 employee of any of the parties, nor a relative or
14 employee of the attorneys of record, or financially
15 interested directly or indirectly in the action.

16 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my
17 hand at Chicago, Illinois, this 16th day of September,
18 2024.

19

20

21

_____*Deborah A. Rannells*_____

Certified Shorthand Reporter

22

Illinois CSR License No. 084-003408

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Key Contacts

Schedule a Deposition:

Scheduling@MagnaLS.com | 866-624-6221

Order a Transcript:

CustomerService@MagnaLS.com | 866-624-6221

General Billing Inquiries:

ARTeam@MagnaLS.com | 866-624-6221

Scheduling Operations Manager:

Patricia Gondor (E: PGondor@MagnaLS.com | C: 215-221-9566)

Customer Care:

Cari Hartley (E: CHartley@MagnaLS.com | C: 843-814-0841)

Director of Production Services:

Ron Hickman (E: RHickman@MagnaLS.com | C: 215-982-0810)

National Director of Discovery Support Services:

Carmella Mazza (E: CMazza@MagnaLS.com | C: 856-495-1920)

Billing Manager:

Maria Capetola (E: MCapetola@MagnaLS.com | C: 215-292-9603)

Director of Sales Operations:

Kristina Moukina (E: KMoukina@MagnaLS.com | C: 215-796-5028)

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