

# **KEEP OUR CARE!**

## **WHY THE LIKELY SALE OF THE PRINCE GEORGE'S HOSPITAL SYSTEM TO A PRIVATE PROVIDER MATTERS**

**The residents of Prince George's County deserve a healthcare system that is prepared to meet the basic health care needs of county residents. Any organization seeking to own and operate the Prince George's County health system must guarantee to improve the quality of medical care available to county residents while maintaining the current level of services, including access to family planning, HIV prevention education, and emergency contraception.**

**Prince George's Hospital system** includes Prince George's Hospital Center in Cheverly, Laurel Regional Hospital, the Bowie Health Campus and two nursing homes. The system, which is owned by the county and managed by the nonprofit Dimensions Healthcare Systems, **serves over 180,000 patients each year** and is one of the county's largest employers.

Appointed by members of the state and county government, a special Hospital Authority is about to issue a Request for Proposals from private health systems to take over the publicly-operated Prince George's County system. **A change in ownership could negatively impact quality of care and result in a reduction of services available to patients.** That is why everyone in Prince George's County should be interested in what decisions the Hospital Authority makes about the future of the county's healthcare system.

### **Possible impact on free care for the indigent**

In order to lower costs and improve the system's troubled financial situation, a private hospital system may alter existing Prince George's County policies on free care for patients who are uninsured. That could mean restrictions on what services are provided to indigent patients and could change the rules about which patients are eligible for free care. Currently, the hospital system runs a yearly deficit of more than \$12 million due in part to the fact that **more than 25% of patients served by Prince George's County hospital system are uninsured.**

### **Possible impact of a takeover by a faith-based hospital system**

Faith-based healthcare systems have already expressed an interest in purchasing the struggling Prince George's county Health System. However, a takeover by a faith-based provider could lead to the elimination of healthcare services relied upon by residents of Prince George's County. For example, many Catholic-affiliated hospital networks are run according to the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.

You should know that at many Catholic-affiliated hospitals:

- Doctors are prohibited from performing, prescribing or even advising patients on the use of **contraception or sterilization**. The *Directives* permit only "natural family planning," and this is limited to married couples.
- Doctors are prohibited from performing or referring their patients for **clinic trials or research** where participation requires the use of a highly effective contraceptive.

- Emergency room doctors may be prohibited from giving Emergency Contraception to women who have been **sexually assaulted**.
- Because the *Directives* prohibit any use of **contraceptives**, doctors cannot counsel individuals with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases to use condoms or other barrier methods.
- Women with **ectopic pregnancies** could not be treated with fallopian tube-sparing surgery or a non-surgical alternative, the drug methotrexate.
- The *Directives* prohibit most **infertility** treatments and some methods of testing for infertility. Patients undergoing fertility-threatening medical treatments, such as chemotherapy, could not be counseled on methods to preserve their ability to have biological children, such as sperm-banking.
- When a woman is having a **miscarriage**, some hospitals interpret the *Directives* to prohibit a uterine evacuation until there is no longer a fetal heartbeat, delaying lifesaving treatment and subjecting women to hemorrhaging and infection.

Advocates who have worked on this issue across the country, such as the MergerWatch Project and the National Women's Law Center, have seen hospitals considering partnerships with Catholic facilities **make and break promises** to not interfere with doctors' ability to care for patients, or to not adhere so closely to the *Directives*. A change in the leadership within the Diocese could result in a change in interpretation of the *Directives*. The *Directives*, available at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), can also be changed at **any time**.

### **What can I do?**

**Have your voice heard:** Contact Kenneth E. Glover, Chair of the Prince George's Hospital Authority, by email at [pgcha@co.pg.md.us](mailto:pgcha@co.pg.md.us) or write to him at P.O. Box 6779 Largo, MD 20792. Tell him that Prince George's County residents deserve to KEEP OUR CARE!

**Sign the Petition!** A coalition of community organizations is collecting signatures to send to the Hospital Authority. Join your neighbors in stating that any new owner of the Prince George's County hospital system must commit to ensuring a continued level of services and improved quality of medical care for Prince George County residents

A coalition of community members and advocates is prepared to protect your right to adequate healthcare access. For more information, please contact the American Civil Liberties Union of the National Capital Area at 202-457-0800, [www.ACLU-NCA.org](http://www.ACLU-NCA.org)

