

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the Committee Report as APPROVED by the Board of Aldermen. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure that this is the Committee Report that was presented at a meeting of the Board of Aldermen, you should check the Minutes of that meeting in order to confirm its approval, rejection or amendment. Do not rely on the accuracy of this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

February 10, 2009

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The Committee on Public Health and Public Safety convened on February 10, 2009, with Chairman William White presiding and Committee Members Aldermen John Connolly and Rebekah Gewirtz also present and voting. Also present were Alderman Bruce Desmond, Administrative Assistant Jesse Baker, Representative Denise Provost, representatives from the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) and interested members of the public.

Ms. Mary Cassesso, Chairman of the CHA Board of Trustees, told the members that community meetings were recently held in Cambridge, Somerville and Everett to inform residents in those service areas of the impending changes. The common themes at each of the meetings dealt with substance abuse, mental health, dental services and teen center summer hours.

Mr. Dennis Keefe, CEO of the CHA, informed the members that meetings were held on all of the alliance's campuses to inform people of the coming changes and to receive their input. Again, the themes were consistent. Four months into the fiscal year, the CHA was informed that \$40 million of their promised and budgeted funds would not be forthcoming. With this loss of funds, the alliance was facing a loss of 15% of its revenue. Meetings were held with CHA officials, mayors, state delegations, Congressman Capuano and officials of Governor Patrick's Administration to address problem. Secretary of Health and Human Services Judyann Bigby met with officials at the CHA and informed them that the state wanted the CHA to decrease its operation. CHA developed a plan that could best provide its core essential services to the communities it serves and presented the plan to Secretary Bigby. On Jan 28th, CHA was informed that their 9c cuts would be restored and they were also told what their FY-10 funding level would be.

The CHA primarily serves a low income population and 85% of its revenue comes from government payments. Those payments only cover about 70% of the actual costs of the care provided. To a large extent, federal funds being used as opposed to state funds and since the CHA is a public hospital, the state tries to get them to secure 100% federal funding. As of now, the funding for CHA is in the state budget – but nothing is guaranteed. The state delegation, and Mayor Curtatone in particular, came together to avert a potentially dangerous situation. Mr. Keefe stressed that Somerville is important to the future of the CHA and he acknowledged that although there will be changes at the Somerville campus, it would be a vibrant and active campus.

Allison Bayer, Chief Operating Officer of the CHA, outlined the criteria used in working with the state towards the proposed plan, among them:

- to maintain all emergency services,
- to provide in-patient care on 2 campuses,
- reducing the number of small clinics by relocating 6 of them,
- consolidating specialty services,
- reducing mental health in-patient services based upon the state's assertion that state has adequate space/facilities,
- eliminating in-patient services at the Somerville campus and
- moving administrative functions to the Somerville campus

Somerville will see the following changes:

- Inpatient Medical/Surgical and Intermediate Care Unit will relocate from Somerville to Cambridge
- The Beacon Street Eye Center will move/combine with the Eye Center at the Somerville Hospital Medical Arts building
- The Somerville dental practice will move/combine with the Cambridge dental practice
- The Inpatient Adolescent Psychiatry will relocate from Somerville to Cambridge
- The Inpatient Geriatric Psychiatry will relocate from Somerville to Everett
- The Inpatient Addictions/Detox Unit in Somerville will close
- The East Somerville Health Center will move/combine with the Broadway Health Center
- The Somerville primary Care practice will move/combine with the Internal Medicine Associates practice at the Somerville Campus to form a new Somerville Hospital Primary Care practice

Dr. John Bruschi, Somerville Hospital Medical Director, told the members that Somerville still has its community hospital. 24 hour emergency care services will continue at Somerville Hospital, without change. In-patient services will be provided at Cambridge Hospital. The Patient Advisory Council has been and will continue to advise CHA on ways to make programs more responsive to patients.

Dr. David Osler, Medical Director - Primary and Ambulatory Care, said that this is a difficult time and that tough decisions are being made. The paramount issue throughout the reorganization is to maintain the quality of the services provided. Patient safety is critical during this disruption, therefore teams will be moved together to provide continuity. Advances in information technology now allow patient data to be instantaneously shared by caregivers, thus providing another level of patient safety.

Dr. Assaad Sayah, Chief of Emergency Services, stated that emergency services will remain open 24/7 with the same staff and care that the community has relied on. All sub-specialties will be available for consultation services. Acute and non-acute care will be provided. It was noted that the number of patients arriving by ambulance has risen, due in part to the quality of care and patient satisfaction being provided by the hospital.

Alderman Desmond expressed concern about the closing of the Inpatient Addiction/Detox Unit. Ms. Bayer explained that of the 1700 cases treated at the unit per year, 54% of those individuals did not live within CHA service areas. Dr. Sayah added that once a patient is determined to be medically and psychiatrically stable, CHA would continue to work with other facilities to get patients placed. It was also

noted that since admission to a detox facility is voluntary, many of the individuals who come to CHA are not actually treated there.

Ms. Bayer informed the members that about 300 jobs will be lost as a result of the planned changes. The CHA system will be downsized, resulting in several thousand less discharges per year. Ms. Bayer also said that all CHA patients would be mailed a letter, in their language, informing them of the changes.

Chairman White requested to be informed of the number of jobs that would be lost in Somerville and he also requested a summary of the 3 forthcoming transitional reports, when they are completed.

No papers were acted on.

Alderman William A. White, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Public Health and Public Safety