

DAILY FREEMAN

Kingston aldermen consider resolution seeking return of behavioral health, detox unit to city

[By Ariél Zangla azangla@freemanonline.com](mailto:azangla@freemanonline.com) [@arielatfreeman on Twitter](https://twitter.com/arielatfreeman)

Nov 21, 2020

KINGSTON, N.Y. — City aldermen are considering adding their support to efforts to have Westchester Medical Center return the adult in-patient behavioral health and detox unit back to HealthAlliance Hospital.

During an online meeting of the Common Council's Laws and Rules Committee on Wednesday, Nov. 18, aldermen unanimously endorsed a memorializing resolution calling for the return of the behavioral health unit to the Mary's Avenue campus of HealthAlliance Hospital and for Westchester Medical Center to not seek approval from the state to permanently move those units to MidHudson Regional Hospital in Poughkeepsie, which is part of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network.

The resolution also calls on the state Department of Health, the state Department of Mental Health, the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports, and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to reject any application made by Westchester Medical Center to permanently move the adult in-patient behavioral health and detox units.

HealthAlliance of the Hudson Valley is a member of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network.

The memorializing resolution will go to the full council on Tuesday, Dec. 1, for a vote. If adopted, it would be forwarded to the state agencies and other stakeholders.

"This is a really important issue for our community and our county," Alderwoman Michele Hirsch, D-Ward 9, told the committee. She said 60 in-patient hospital beds for the mental health and detox unit were moved from the Mary's Avenue campus to Poughkeepsie during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hirsch said it was believed the move that took place in March would be temporary to make sure the HealthAlliance Hospital could be used for COVID response.

The need to use the hospital for COVID patients, however, never materialized.

Hirsch, who introduced the memorializing resolution, said with the move of the beds, patients in Kingston's emergency room have to wait longer for space to open up in Poughkeepsie or as far away as Westchester County. This creates a burden on patients and their families and also decreases the level of service for the county, which is facing a dangerous opioid epidemic, she said.

"We were always under the impression that our beds were going to come back once COVID was over and once Mary's Avenue hospital, HealthAlliance, was declassified as a COVID hospital," Hirsch said. "But now Westchester Medical Center said that they are making an application to the state Department of Health to permanently remove these beds from the HealthAlliance Hospital of the Hudson Valley."

Westchester Medical Center has said it will seek state approval to move inpatient mental health and detox services out of Kingston permanently to its MidHudson Regional Hospital.

Hirsch said that due to the way Medicaid is set up and its reimbursement rates, Westchester Medical Center gets more money from the state by having the unit in Dutchess County. She said the move puts "profits over people."

Alderwoman Rita Worthington, D-Ward 4, called the move "despicable," while Majority Leader Reynolds Scott-Childress, D-Ward 3, said Westchester Medical Center was using the COVID crisis to benefit with little regard for the people it is supposed to serve.

"To remove this kind of support is absolutely unconscionable because you've got a significant population of folks who need precisely this service here," Scott-Childress said.

Hirsch said she would share the resolution with other Ulster County municipalities in the hopes they too would adopt it and send a message to the state. She said she also hoped community members would do the same.

Earlier this month, state Assemblyman Kevin Cahill said the move by Westchester Medical Center was in [violation of its licensing agreement](#) with the state.