

# DAILY FREEMAN

## Kingston council calls for return of behavioral health, detox units back to city hospital

By Ariél Zangla

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The Mary's Avenue Campus of HealthAlliance Hospital in Kingston, N.Y., is shown from the facility's parking lot on Thursday, May 28, 2020.

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KINGSTON, N.Y. — Returning the adult in-patient behavioral health and detox units back to HealthAlliance Hospital is a matter of public safety and Kingston cannot afford to lose those services, city lawmakers said.

During an online meeting Tuesday, the Common Council unanimously adopted a memorializing resolution calling for the return of the behavioral health and medical managed withdrawal units to the Mary's Avenue campus of HealthAlliance Hospital. It also called on Westchester Medical Center to honor its license agreement and not seek approval from the state to permanently move those units to Mid-Hudson Regional Hospital in Poughkeepsie, which is part of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network.

The resolution also asks 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.

Alderwoman Michele Hirsch, D-Ward 9, said the resolution deals with the public safety of the community, which is paramount to her. She added that budget cuts are being made at the state level that affect the most vulnerable populations. It is necessary to properly fund programs that support the community, including Kingston's hospital beds, Hirsch said.

The 60 in-patient hospital beds for the mental health and detox units were moved from the Mary's Avenue campus to Poughkeepsie during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, a move that was believed to be temporary to free up space so the HelathAlliance Hospital could be used for response to the pandemic. The need to use the hospital for COVID patients, however, never materialized.

Later, representatives of Westchester Medical Center said it would seek state approval to move in-patient mental health and detox services out of Kingston permanently to its MidHudson Regional Hospital.

Majority Leader Reynolds Scott-Childress said the move means local residents have to travel long distances to receive services they had previously gotten in Kingston.

"Which means that our local residents, in order to have their psychiatric care needs taken care of in emergencies and difficult situations, have that compounded by having to travel long distances away from family, away from caregivers, away from what's familiar," Scott-Childress, D-Ward 3, said. He added that the decision to move those services were made by two people who are not from the area and are not familiar with it.

"Kingston and Ulster County cannot afford to lose the mental health unit or the in-patient substance abuse unit that we used to have here," Scott-Childress said. "Our bottom line is not, and should never be, the bottom line of Westchester Medical Center."