



**PLANNED PARENTHOOD
OF NEW YORK CITY**



Proposed New York State Hospital Closures, Mergers, and Downsizings Could Endanger Women’s Health, Groups Warn

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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November 28, 2006 -- Proposed closings, downsizings and consolidations of New York hospitals recommended by a state Commission today could endanger community access to reproductive health services, three organizations engaged in women’s health advocacy warned today.

The Reproductive Rights Project of the New York Civil Liberties Union, the MergerWatch Project and Planned Parenthood of New York City urged state and local policymakers to hold public hearings on the potential impact of the recommendations of the New York State Commission on Health Facilities in the 21st Century, released today.

The groups argue that public hearings are essential to ensure that each proposed closing, downsizing or merger be individually evaluated for its impact on access to care. The “fast-track” approval process—under which the Governor has just one week to accept or reject the recommendations in total, and the Legislature has only until the end of December—is ill considered and fails to permit the proper evaluation of the recommendations, the groups said.

“We are concerned that three of these proposed closings and mergers would seriously impair local women’s ability to get adequate health services,” said Elisabeth Benjamin, Director of the NYCLU Reproductive Rights Project. “After taking public comments back in the spring, the Commission has made all of its decisions behind closed doors, and their recommendations clearly fail to consider the impact these proposed closures and mergers have on women’s health: The public must be permitted a chance to comment on the Commission’s report.”

Benjamin noted that the Commission proposes to merge Kingston Hospital and Benedictine Hospital, which are located a short distance from each other in Kingston, and

where the community previously objected to Benedictine's proposal to impose Catholic health care restrictions on the merged entity.

Other closings and mergers of concern for their possible adverse impact on women's health are: the closure of Bellevue Hospital and proposed merger of Ellis and St. Claire's in Schenectady County; the proposed merger of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center and Mount St. Mary's Medical Center in Lewiston; and the proposed merger of Arnot Ogden Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital in the Syracuse region.

Lois Uttley, Director of the MergerWatch Project, warned that proposed religious/secular hospital mergers – such as secular Kingston Hospital and Catholic Benedictine Hospital in Kingston, NY -- could leave women without a local hospital that provides a full range of reproductive health services. Catholic-affiliated hospitals prohibit a number of reproductive health services, including contraception, tubal ligations, vasectomies, abortions, in vitro fertilization and discussion of condom use to prevent sexually-transmitted disease

“Extra care must be taken to ensure that access to reproductive health services is not sacrificed in these proposed religious/secular hospital mergers,” Uttley said.

A second possible combination of Catholic and secular hospitals may occur in Schenectady, where the Bellevue Women's Hospital is to close and the two remaining hospitals – secular Ellis Hospital and Catholic St. Clare's – will be urged to consolidate.

Joan Malin, President & CEO of Planned Parenthood of New York City, said that while some women's reproductive services can be provided at outpatient clinics, hospitals remain important providers of such care as post-partum tubal ligations, bedside contraceptive counseling for new mothers and abortions for women with complicating factors.

“While we certainly applaud the idea of directing additional resources to enhance the delivery of outpatient primary care in New York, hospital-based reproductive health care must still be maintained as a top priority,” Malin said.

The three organizations urged state policymakers to refuse to go along with an agreement recently negotiated between outgoing Governor George Pataki and the federal government that conditions receipt of more than \$1 billion in federal funds on acceptance and implementation of the hospital commission's recommendations.