To:
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
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RECEIVED
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HEALTH FACILITIES & SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

Re: Request to close Mental Health Services at Javon Bea/Mercyhealth Rockford

To whom it may concern —

My younger brother Eli has suffered from mental illness / schizophrenia for the last 15 years. It came on suddenly when he turned 22 and unfortunately, his case has proven to be severe. Even when on meds, he requires a few hospitalizations a year (sometimes many more). The illness can be managed, but it will never go away. Learning and dealing with the mental health system in Illinois has been a rough ride, especially for my parents.

Budget cuts under Bruce Rauner closed every single long-term mental care facility in the Rockford region — there are no more full time care facilities for people like my brother. Recently, any remaining group homes / assisted living facilities have closed their intake due to COVID concerns. It's estimated that one third of all inmates in IL prisons are mentally ill (we closed the mental asylums, only to replace them with prisons, where the mentally ill receive a fraction of the care they need, and are vulnerable to attacks from other inmates or correctional officers.)

If the Rockton Mercyhealth campus closes for mental health care, the remaining immediate care hospital (Swedish American) only has about 35 beds for mental / behavioral patients. When those beds are full (and they frequently are — in our 15 years of dealing with my brothers' illness, more than half the time there have been no beds available), patients are either denied care, simply turned away, or at best, shipped off into Chicago or further away for treatment. We've been though this a hundred times (unfortunately, not an exaggeration). My brother has been sent to Aurora, far south Chicago, St Louis, and beyond. Of course, this makes follow-up care and family support incredibly difficult, so the likelihood of repeat hospitalization goes up. We've heard the term 'revolving door patient" entirely too many times.

Now Javon Bea is seeking to discontinue the mental health services at MercyHealth on Rockton. They're saying that there's not enough demand, that there's only 2-3 mental health calls per day. I can only give my personal / anecdotal evidence. Despite my brother being admitted to that hospital many times over the years, the last time we took my brother there (earlier this year, Feb 4) in the midst of another psychotic episode, he was refused care — the nurses said "He needs acute care and we can't help with that." According to nurses I've spoken with, the numbers are being fudged to make it easier to remove this service from the Reckon Avenue Mercyhealth. Of course, it's easy to claim there's only have 2-3 patients a day, when a hospital refuses to admit patients.

I realize that I don't know the ins and outs of running hospitals. That's beyond my pay grade. But from my perspective, this is absolutely the wrong direction our community should be heading. I believe that our elected leaders and now, CEOs of huge hospital conglomerates, are truly failing the "least of us," the people who can't stand up for themselves.

Javon Bea / Mercyhealth should not be allowed to discontinue their behavioral health treatment, as they are sorely needed in our community.

Thank you for your time.