

**OPPOSE:** The transfer of the children’s psychiatric unit from Hutchings Psychiatric Center to SUNY Upstate

Dear Legislator:

As an employee at Hutchings Psychiatric Center and a member of the Public Employees Federation, I am writing to encourage you to OPPOSE the transfer of the children’s psychiatric unit at Hutchings Psychiatric Center to SUNY Upstate that was recently announced by Office of Mental Health Commissioner Ann Sullivan, M.D. This is not good for our children. It is not good for our families. And it is not good for our community.

First, contrary to the requirements stated in the 2017 budget agreement, the caregivers at Hutchings were never contacted to discuss this transfer or whether this transfer was in the best interests of their clients.

Second, unlike the requirement stipulated in the agreement, this transfer is NOT “an expansion in the scope of services.” Hutchings Psychiatric Center currently has the capacity for 30 inpatient beds, but only has enough state aid to fund 23 psychiatric beds. SUNY claims it will expand beds to 29 beds, but 11 of those beds will be dedicated to a new program to assist individuals from across the state with dual diagnoses of mental health and developmental disability issues. That only leaves 18 beds for children with mental health issues in Onondaga, Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, and Oswego counties.

Third, SUNY is a teaching institution, not a mental health care provider. The clients at Hutchings have been receiving care from the dedicated professionals at Hutchings over many years and in some instances across generations. The psychiatrists at Hutchings are board certified in child psychiatry, and provide the treatment direction and leadership for the team. If this program is transferred to SUNY Upstate, who will be rendering care? While there is much to gain from having a teaching hospital in our community, do the faculty and staff at SUNY Upstate have the practical experience to render care to this specialized group of clients?

Fourth, one of the most important programs Hutchings provides is education for clients. While a child receives treatment, they are able to receive services for a FULL school equivalency program that ensures they do not fall behind. This cannot be compared to the tutoring offered at an Article 28 hospital. While adults usually identify their success with their career, we know that our children identify heavily with academic success. Certified regular and special education teachers give our patients the advantage of progressing in not only their personal treatment, but returning to a school situation that is often better than when they left.

In closing, Hutchings Psychiatric Center has the most experienced team there is and we should be fortifying the services they provide to the youth in OUR community. Many have been rendering psychiatric care to clients and families for more than 10 years. If there is a flaw in the Hutchings Psychiatric Center’s continuum of care, it is linked to the state’s systemic lack of support for the individuals who require care in state-sponsored inpatient and mental health programs. Austerity budgeting and unilateral bed closures have resulted in Hutchings Psychiatric Center not having sufficient staff or resources to help the residents in our community who need care. Let me repeat, there are currently 23 inpatient beds available at Hutchings Psychiatric Center to help stabilize the residents in crisis in Onondaga, Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, and Oswego counties. This transfer will further REDUCE the available beds for youth in our community.

It is for these reasons that I ask you to oppose the transfer of the children’s psychiatric unit at Hutchings Psychiatric Center to SUNY Upstate. This plan will cut services to mentally ill youth in our community and will result in severe and significant consequences for your constituents.

Sincerely,

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_