

February 21, 2022

Chair Liebling and Committee members:

Children's Minnesota has started plans to add 22 Pediatric Mental Health Beds to its St. Paul Hospital (HF 3470). Mental Health is becoming a crisis in our most vulnerable patients, children.

The physicians, nurses, social workers, bedside staff believe this to be an asset to the community on one condition, that Children's stops its plans to close their 12 bed Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (ICU) which is set to occur around the same time of the Behavioral Health unit opening.

Staff in the Pediatric ICU and Emergency Room in St. Paul have been told this closure will occur around November 2022. The new Behavioral Health unit is slated to open the end of 2022 or beginning of 2023.

Without an ICU the concern of staff is how to stabilize a critical Mental Health Patient who has overdosed, or who is so combative they need 4-point restraints and multiple medications to calm them. Once these medications take hold the medical need requires a high level of care.

Children often come in to the Emergency Department (ED) with their parents after ingesting medications, drugs, and harmful chemicals. These kids present ok medically until the substances kick in and then they are extremely sick or become unresponsive. They can require ICU care until medically able to go to a Behavioral Health unit.

Children's will have to arrange for an ambulance to transport these various types of critical patients across the city to their Minneapolis Campus for ICU monitoring or closer monitoring on a Medical Surgical floor. Once the patient is stabilized, they would arrange to transport via ambulance back to the St. Paul Behavioral Health Unit. Children's does not transport these patients themselves and contracts with Alina and other EMS services.

Getting transport is not always easy or timely. We have had up to 7 hour waits the last year. A child who requires Intensive Care cannot and should not have to wait to be transported across the city when the St. Paul Campus has a 12-bed unit that has been a staple to the East/South Metro communities and those in Western Wisconsin. There isn't another Pediatric ICU who will take these patients in St Paul as an option if needed.

The St. Paul Campus has already seen their Behavioral Health patients double just with the marketing from Children's saying they plan to open a new unit. The reality is when/if a unit were to open, the number of patients will exceed the number of beds available. There will be increased ER wait times and Behavioral Health patients sitting in the ED waiting for an opening. This has already occurred with patients waiting over a week in the ED. With this increase, comes the increase of the sickest children coming to the campus that has the Behavioral Health

Unit. Without an ICU to help stabilize, our patients will have a critical delay or care which result in negative outcomes. We need to keep our Pediatric ICU to safely open a much needed Behavioral Health Unit in St. Paul. Children's needs to provide safe, equitable care at their St. Paul campus.

Jayne Wicklund, RN, Children's St. Paul