



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Standing Room Crowd Sends a Clear Message to Albany: Save St. Lawrence Psych Center

PATTY RITCHIE September 17, 2013

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More than 100 concerned citizens packed Ogdensburg's City Council chambers Tuesday to oppose Albany's plan to shift inpatient mental health care services from the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center to other facilities hundreds of miles from the North Country.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH SENATOR RITCHIE'S REMARKS ON SLPC](#)

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE FULL PUBLIC HEARING \(07h, 30m\)](#)

They were participating in a joint public hearing by the State Senate's Mental Health and Health Committees, and the Assembly Mental Health Committee.

Senator Patty Ritchie joined Senate Mental Health Committee Chair David Carlucci and other legislative colleagues at the hearing. Senator Ritchie has been a strong supporter of the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, serving as a member of the local Psych Center Task Force, and leading an online petition drive that amassed 2,200 signatures of supporters, and a separate postcard campaign that delivered more than 5,000 "Don't Shut the Lights Out on the North Country" messages to Albany officials in support of the Psych Center.

The following are remarks delivered by Senator Ritchie at the opening of today's legislative hearing in Ogdensburg:

"I would like to welcome the Senate Mental Health and Health Committees and Assembly Mental Health Committee to Ogdensburg and Northern New York.

"I especially want to thank Senator Carlucci and Assemblywoman Gunther for traveling across the state to hear firsthand how the Office of Mental Health's misguided plan will endanger the residents of the Northern New York who depend on our mental health system. I also want to thank my good friend, Senator Betty Little, for joining us today

"When I first learned that Albany was looking at changing our mental health system I brought a lot of our community leaders together so that we could make our best case for preserving and even strengthening critically important mental health services right here in the North Country.

Originally, OMH wasn't even going to hold one of their 'listening tour' visits here in the North Country, but I was able to convince them to add Ogdensburg to their schedule.

When they came, we had the largest turnout at any event in the state. We presented a petition with over 1200 signatures and personal stories about what the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center meant to individual patient, families and this community.

Unfortunately, OMH's Centers of Excellence report showed a lot of us that Albany had not listened to a word we said.

That's why I am so glad that the Senate and the Assembly are here today to give us a chance to make our case and be heard.

The speakers you are going to hear from today will tell you how Albany is shortchanging Northern New York and thousands of families who need us to be there for them and their loved ones.

They will tell you how this plan puts our most vulnerable children at risk by shipping them far from their families when they need our help and care the most.

You will hear how this plan shortchanges every county north of the Thruway and every family between Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario.

It is clear to us that moving care downstate will do nothing to improve health care, but it will put many of our most vulnerable citizens in danger.

The sad truth is OMH's plan really isn't a plan at all. There's nothing in this proposal that improves care or provides centers of excellence. It just puts our most vulnerable citizens and children in danger and at risk in places far from their families.

Yes, the Psych center fight is about jobs. More importantly, it's about securing for families, children and the next generation, the kind of quality mental health care we need."