Targeting of Rockford’s Singer Mental Health Center revives concerns

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ROCKFORD — Gov. Pat Quinn in his Wednesday budget address resurrected plans to close Rockford’s Singer Mental Health Center, though he didn’t indicate where residents would be relocated.

Philip Eaton, president and CEO of Rosecrance Health Network, said in a statement that closing Singer “appears to make sense” because of the state’s fiscal crisis, but officials want a valid transition plan in place before any changes are made.

Rosecrance, which last year completed its acquisition of Janet Wattles Center, provides both addiction treatment and mental health services.

The bipartisan Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability voted last fall against closing Singer based on hearing testimony that also expressed concern about the state’s lack of a transition plan dedicated to moving Singer residents to community-based care.

“Now it is critical that the state and appropriate parties in communities begin making a solid plan to care for this vulnerable population,” Eaton said. “We are ready to play a role in creating a transition plan for individuals who need the services that currently are being offered at Singer. We desperately need those services in our community, and the ramifications of not having them will be dramatic.

“Without appropriate transition services and ongoing community-based care, there is great danger of very vulnerable people falling through the cracks. We can expect more and more people to start showing up in emergency rooms, in the backs of police cars or ambulances.”

The state owes Rosecrance $9 million for mental health and substance abuse services already provided to clients. Further cuts in the Medicaid program would harm more than just hospitals.

Rosecrance could lose upward of $1.8 million based on Quinn’s proposal, Chief Financial Officer John Schuster said in a statement, and even more dollars from cuts in mental health grants.

“The bottom line is it hits the most vulnerable people,” Schuster said. “The overall impact is difficult to determine right now, but on the face of it, it appears that we would see a reduction of about $3 million in state funding that Rosecrance uses to serve the most vulnerable people.

“This is a starting point for our planning, but we still have to see what the Legislature does and how the (Illinois Department of Human Services) implements the cuts.”

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