



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Bill Would Block Psych Center Closing

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State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced new legislation to stop the state's plans to close the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center's inpatient care facilities, and give state mental health officials and community members additional time to seek alternatives..

The "Freeze Unsafe Closures Now Act," S.5986, is jointly sponsored by Senator Ritchie and Senator Thomas Libous, the Deputy Senate Leader, whose district also is hard hit by the state's plan that slashes inpatient mental health care.

"The state's plan puts our most vulnerable citizens and children in danger, without a clear alternative that ensures sufficient, continued mental health care services close to home and in our communities," Senator Ritchie said.

"The changes envisioned by the state are too drastic, and they come too quickly for communities and the mental health care system to adjust. We need to take a step back and come up with a better way of improving mental health care that doesn't leave patients, families and communities stranded."

The state Office of Mental Health's plan—which was unveiled last summer, after the Legislature finished its session and left the capital—would shrink the state's system of 24 psychiatric hospitals to just 15, with none located north or south of the Thruway, leaving millions of New Yorkers without sufficient nearby treatment options in their communities.

Senator Ritchie's bill would freeze that plan until at least 2015, giving state leaders more time to come up with other options. Under the existing plan, adult and children's inpatient treatment services at the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center are to be shifted to Syracuse and Utica beginning next year. Senator Ritchie has been critical of the OMH plan because it would require families to travel 100 miles or more to find inpatient care for serious mental health issues, and because the state has offered nothing more than vague promises to improve community-based care. She also has cited the plan's economic impact on a region that already struggles with high unemployment. More than 500 jobs will be impacted by the plan.