



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patrick M. Gallivan

## The Fight to Keep WNYCPC Open Continues

PATRICK GALLIVAN March 29, 2016

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In the summer of 2013, the New York State Office of Mental Health unveiled a plan to reduce the number of psychiatric centers across the state from 24 to 15. As part of the proposal, the Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center in West Seneca was scheduled to close its West Seneca facility and move operations to the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, which currently only serves adults. The governor's office has sole authority to make the changes.

But while the administration does not need legislative approval to proceed, I continue to work closely with my colleagues in the Senate and Assembly to keep WNYCPC open and our

fight to keep the facility at its current location continues. Members of the Save Our WNY Children's Psychiatric Center Coalition have also worked tirelessly to support the center, its staff and the families who depend on it.

The argument to keep WNYCPC open, in my mind, is simple. The facility cares for our most vulnerable citizens, emotionally disturbed children between the ages of 4 and 18. Patients come from 19 counties across the state and receive treatment in a facility specially designed for them. The West Seneca center is among the best, having been rated in the top 10 percent of hospitals in the nation accredited by the Joint Commission in 2012.

Moving these young patients to the Buffalo Psychiatric Center would be detrimental to their treatment. The children would be restricted to just two floors of the 8-story building that houses and treats adult psychiatric patients, including Level 3 sex offenders. Nearly 50 years ago, we moved children out of adult psychiatric centers because it was found to not be beneficial or therapeutic to have young patients, many of whom are victims of physical or sexual abuse, living among adults. I see no reason to return to that flawed model of treatment.

Some argue that closing WNYCPC will save the state money, but during a recent Office of Mental Health public forum, it was revealed that the cost of moving the children's facility to Buffalo is roughly the same as the cost to renovate the current center in West Seneca.

Over the past two years, we have succeeded in securing funding in the state budget to keep WNYCPC open. In a recent letter to Senate leaders, I once again called for the continued funding of the center in its current location.

Going forward, we must find a permanent solution to this issue. The West Seneca center serves children who deserve and require special treatment in an environment that allows

them and their families to feel safe and comfortable. Transferring these patients to an adult-oriented facility like the Buffalo Psychiatric Center could jeopardize their mental health and wellbeing.

I will continue to work with families, mental health experts and others to devise a long term plan to meet the needs and challenges of mentally ill children in our community.