



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Reed, O'Mara and Palmesano urge Finger Lakes Health to save mental health unit in Penn Yan: This week's shutdown at Soldiers & Sailors Hospital sounds the alarm among government reps, mental health providers and advocates

THOMAS F. O'MARA February 13, 2019

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES**



Congressman Reed, Senator O'Mara, and Assemblyman Palmesano are urging Finger Lakes Health and the state Office of Mental Health to begin work immediately to find a solution that quickly reopens the Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit to new patients and keeps the unit open for the long term.

Penn Yan, N.Y., February 13—Representative Tom Reed (R-NY), State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), and State Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) are urging Finger Lakes Health and the state Office of Mental Health (OMH) to immediately begin working together to maintain the Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit at Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hospital in Penn Yan.

On Monday, Finger Lakes Health suddenly announced that no new patients are being admitted to the 10-bed mental health unit at Soldiers & Sailors and plans are moving ahead to completely shut down the unit. Finger Lakes Health points to “low census, inadequate reimbursement and ongoing financial losses” as reasons for the closing. It also highlights the loss of a full-time psychiatrist and the ongoing difficulty of recruiting new psychiatrists to provide services as another central reason behind the non-admission of new patients and the units pending closure. Patients are currently being evaluated at the Soldiers & Sailors emergency room and, if approved, referred to other regional facilities.

Reed, O'Mara, and Palmesano fear that the lack of conveniently accessible, affordable, efficient, and cost-effective mental health care will worsen what they already believe is a mental health crisis in Yates County and the surrounding area.

In a February 12th letter (see attached copy above) to Finger Lakes Health President Jose Acevedo and OMH Commissioner Ann Sullivan, the area representatives wrote, “It is critical to note that we share the belief that Yates County and the surrounding area faces a rapidly growing mental health crisis, a crisis that will be exacerbated by this closing and its devastating impact on local residents. It is our understanding that the decision to cease admissions of new patients effective yesterday, Monday, February 11th, was only communicated late last week and, consequently, came as a great shock to employees, patients, the community at large, as well as local, state, and federal officials including ourselves. The lack of mental health services has left many rural, Upstate communities,

including the residents of Yates County, without the critical support services necessary to address the current crisis and ongoing mental health needs. We should be working to expand mental health services, not take them away from people.”

Reed, O’Mara, and Palmesano are urging Finger Lakes Health and the OMH to begin work immediately to find a solution that quickly reopens the Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit to new patients and keeps the unit open for the long term.

They wrote, “We are confident that you know as well as we do that rural communities face many and more different obstacles not common with big cities, one of which is the proximity to the delivery of services at a level that provides accessibility, efficiency, and cost effectiveness. While we recognize the struggles Finger Lakes Health has experienced both with the efficiency of providing mental health services and the recruitment of psychiatrists, we are writing to urge you to immediately work closely together to prevent the complete closure of the Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit at Soldiers & Sailors. We are committed to provide whatever assistance is necessary and to advocate for the resources Finger Lakes Health requires to continue the Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit at Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hospital to continue meeting the need for these critical services throughout Yates County and the surrounding area. Perhaps most importantly, we implore you to reconsider the decision to cease admissions of new patients and the future closure of the unit.”

On Monday, the **Yates County Legislature also adopted a resolution** opposing the unit’s closure.