

State regulators have put up a roadblock to plans to eliminate inpatient psychiatric services at Northwest Community Healthcare in Arlington Heights.

Corporate owner Endeavor Health's request to close the 52-bed NCH Behavioral Health Center, 901 W. Kirchoff Road, failed to gain approval from the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board.

The panel deadlocked 4-4 Tuesday on the hospital system's formal application to discontinue the inpatient acute mental illness category of service on the Arlington Heights campus.

Next steps, including whether Endeavor might appeal the decision, were immediately unclear.

Officials had been planning to close the clinic April 11. Some 100 nurses and others with specialized skills who work there, as well as a "small number" of others who work at the main hospital next door, have already gotten pink slips, officials said.

"Continuing to operate this unit, even at a reduced capacity, is unsustainable and could present many challenges, including staffing, safety and efficiency and impact our ability to deliver the care our patients deserve and our team members are dedicated to providing," according to a statement provided by an Endeavor spokesman Wednesday. "We have followed all state and regulatory requirements, and our position remains focused on supporting the transition of inpatient behavioral health services at NCH."

Northwest suburban mental health advocates who attended the meeting celebrated the decision. They believe speaking out against the proposed cuts after they were announced Jan. 30 may have made a difference.

“There’s a need for inpatient beds, and if they close this unit, then it’s going to be exceedingly difficult for people in our area to get to their family member who might be in an inpatient unit someplace else,” said Hugh Brady, a board member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Illinois chapter.

Endeavor officials attributed the decision to discontinue inpatient services in Arlington Heights to a decline in demand, market trends and operational challenges.

Northwest Community saw a 15% decrease in admissions for acute mental illness from 2018 to 2023, according to the state board staff report.

Endeavor officials said the lower patient volumes have made it more difficult to retain experienced staff, leading to higher turnover and increased operational costs.

They also cited state statistics showing an excess of 71 beds in the Northwest suburban hospital planning area of Maine, Elk Grove, Schaumburg, Palatine and Wheeling townships.

Endeavor added that their systemwide capacity of 204 beds would allow for patient transitions between facilities, including the Linden Oaks psychiatric hospital in Naperville and three other hospitals with

inpatient psychiatric units: Highland Park Hospital, Evanston Hospital and Swedish Hospital in Chicago.

At the same time, Northwest Community will continue outpatient services such as day programs, counseling, provider clinics and emergency department crisis stabilization, officials said.

Brady acknowledged there are other providers of inpatient treatment, but they don't necessarily take Medicaid and other insurance. And he said day programs don't work for everyone.

“Outpatient services can be good, but for people with serious mental illnesses, it's frequently not an option,” Brady said.