

Tuscola County's Response to the Myers and Stauffer "Caro Center Evaluation" and Recommendations from DHHS Director Gordon to Gov. Whitmer

August 1, 2019

1. We applaud the recommendation that the Caro Center remain as a provider of state inpatient psychiatric services.
2. But we are concerned that the recommendations include a significant reduction in beds at Caro, and "renovation," instead of replacement, of the current facilities.
3. This is just one step in negotiations on the Caro Center and state inpatient psychiatric services, and we will continue our conversations with the Governor, DHHS and the Legislature.
4. We continue to advocate for a new facility. Renovating the aging facilities at Caro has already been soundly rejected as more costly than a new build (Feb. 2017 Report by State Budget Office/DTMB to Legislative Joint Capital Outlay Committee).
5. We are uncomfortable with such a sizeable, permanent reduction in beds. The Caro Center has historically served 145-150 patients. It is true that the patient census was temporarily reduced in March because of a MIOSHA investigation. But we question the wisdom of permanently reducing Caro's capacity to 84 beds, and we are concerned about the eventual associated loss in jobs.
6. We believe that mental health advocates, especially those serving rural and northern communities in our state, need to provide their input on the Department's plans to shift 61 beds at Caro to existing state hospitals "closer to major population centers" and to expand "community-based options." In our view, a "Northern Satellite" facility (either new build or partnership with existing facilities) is supported by the planning process initiated by the Legislature in 2018. Again, advocates for individuals with mental illness need to be at the table for these negotiations.
7. We have heard promises of an accessible community-based system of care before, but the fact remains that many individuals experiencing mental illness are instead found in local jails, emergency rooms and homeless shelters.
8. The County believes that the state should take responsibility for demolition of 20 state-owned, abandoned structures. On the 650 acres that comprise the Caro Center, there are 38 buildings, the newest of which is over 60 years old. Eighteen of the buildings are uninhabitable and two buildings have been closed since September 2015 due to facility conditions. These state-owned, dilapidated and abandoned structures are a significant barrier to future economic development on the site.