



April 10, 2008 Thursday

Helping to save area hospitals

By: John Peller, Director of Government Relations, AIDS Foundation of Chicago

Until Illinois fixes our broken health-care system, hospital closings like the one in Blue Island are inevitable ("The hospital they just couldn't save; Serving uninsured a fatal burden for Blue Island facility," Page 1, April 3).

The St. Francis hospital administrator announced that the facility will shutter its doors because of \$20 million in losses that stem, in part, from the high cost of caring for an ever-growing number of uninsured patients.

Neighborhood residents and people with HIV/AIDS will undoubtedly suffer by being forced to travel further for vital care.

Senate Bill 1925, sponsored by state Sen. Jeff Schoenberg (D-Evanston), would be a big step toward providing relief to hospitals like St. Francis. Most important, it would provide health insurance to vulnerable state residents who earn less than about \$10,000 per year, including thousands living with HIV/AIDS. An estimated 338,000 Illinoisans would be covered by this program, or a quarter of the state's 1.4 million uninsured.

If the bill becomes law, Illinois hospitals will be able to get paid for services provided to these formerly uninsured individuals, increasing hospitals' financial solvency. Hundreds of thousands of extremely low-income individuals would get the medical care they need but can't afford.

Furthermore, Schoenberg's bill would have direct benefits for everyone with insurance. As the amount of uncompensated care drops and hospitals are able to lower their rates, we would see a reduction in annual increases in private insurance premiums.

This bill makes financial and medical sense, and we urge the legislature to pass it and the governor to sign it into law.

St. Francis couldn't be saved, but there are other, still-open hospitals that can be.