

## Group tells legislators child care center should be left open

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A group of more than 20 people asked Genesee County legislators Wednesday to keep open the child care center inside the County Nursing Home.

City resident Amanda Brown spoke on behalf of the citizens and asked lawmakers to delay the shutdown for at least six months. It is slated to close its doors Dec. 31.

Brown, who has a daughter at the center, said she and other parents want more time to research the issue.

“We’d just like a chance. This is an emotional topic for us,” she said to the county Ways & Means Committee.

Brown has extensive experience in the skilled nursing field. She is executive vice president of Kirkhaven, a 143-bed nursing and rehabilitation facility for the elderly in Rochester.

The concerned citizens, including parents of 13 children enrolled in the child care program and seven of its employees, packed the conference room in which Ways & Means Committee conducted its meeting. The crowd overflowed into the first floor hallway of the Old County Courthouse.

Brown said the parents see the “big picture” facing the county and the nursing home.

The skilled nursing facility has had an operating deficit in each of the past eight years and that will most likely continue in 2012. The county administration is still working on the proposed 2012 budget, which County Manager Jay Gsell has said will be “ugly,” and include 5 percent decreases in spending for most county departments.

The child care center lost an average of \$30,000 annually in the years 2005 to 2009, according to a report prepared by a consultant for the Legislature.

Lawmakers decided to close the child center’s doors as part a reorganization of the nursing home. The county will offer more services to senior citizens as part of the planned changes, Gsell said earlier this month.

“No one came to explain. This is not just a business decision,” said Brown, who found out about the shutdown in early October.

The Center for Governmental Research, the consultant hired by the county in 2009 to research options on what to do with the nursing home and stop the flow of red ink, cited closing down child care as a possibility for the Legislature to consider. It was not the only choice provided by CGR, Brown said.

“Has a comprehensive business plan been developed?” she asked.

The nursing home runs an adult care center that functions in a manner similar to child care. The child care business was operating at capacity — 40 children ages six weeks to five years are enrolled — while the adult care center has never been full, Brown said.

“We question whether adult day care is viable,” Brown said.

According to CGR, the adult care program lost an average of \$70,000 per year from 2005 to '09. The domiciliary, the nursing home's assisted living program, averaged \$103,000 in annual losses in the same four-year period, Graham said.

Child Care Network of Erie County runs the nursing home's child care center, which has operated for the past 22 years. Child Care Network pays no rent for its first-floor space.

Legislator Jerome Grasso, vice chairman of Ways & Means, thanked the citizens for voicing their concerns. Lawmakers “do appreciate” the importance of the issue, he said.

Graham said other parents who have children in the nursing home facility love the place, though it costs about \$170 per week for one child, about 10 percent more expensive than rates at other child care businesses in the Batavia area.

Graham and several other parents said outside the conference room there are no other available spaces in child care centers in the vicinity.

Sabrina Brinkman, who attended the meeting with her husband, Rod, said she transferred the couple's 3 1/2-year-old son to Lucky Ducky child care, and she got one of only two slots that were available.

The Brinkmans also said they liked the intergenerational aspect at the nursing home, where children and seniors are involved in joint activities.

“When we bring our kid in you can see the nursing home residents light up,” Mr. Brinkman said.

The child care center also conducts graduation ceremonies for the children, which is also enjoyed by the senior citizens, he said.