

September 25, 2009

Prince George's County Hospital Authority
Attention: Kenneth E. Glover, Chair
P.O. Box 6779 Largo, MD 20792
Re: Protecting Public Health and Reproductive Choice in Prince George's County

Dear Chairman Glover:

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION OF
MARYLAND FOUNDATION
3600 CLIPPER MILL ROAD
SUITE 350
BALTIMORE, MD 21211
T/410-889-8555
F/410-366-7838
WWW.ACLU-MD.ORG

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
SARA N. LOVE
PRESIDENT

SUSAN GOERING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

C. CHRISTOPHER BROWN
GENERAL COUNSEL

We thank you for your invitation to express our views concerning the evaluation of bids to purchase the county health system. In the evaluation process, the Prince George's County Hospital Authority should ensure that county residents continue to have access to high-quality reproductive health care and HIV/AIDS prevention services. To this end, we urge that each bid be carefully examined to ascertain whether the bidder commits to:

- 1) Counseling patients on the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as for family planning;
- 2) Ensuring that patients have access to abortions, consistent with applicable law and sound medical practice;
- 3) Ensuring that male and female patients have access to elective surgical sterilization procedures; and
- 4) Providing emergency contraception to all patients who request it, and in particular, to sexual assault victims.

We note that at least one of the bidders, Washington Adventist Hospital, is affiliated with a religious organization and for religious reasons may not be committed to provide the services described above.

A health system governed by religious policies will likely fail to meet the medical needs of Prince George's County residents. Laurel Regional Hospital and Prince George's Hospital Center had nearly 4,000 obstetrics patients in 2006. For these patients and many others, the ability to obtain reproductive health services is vitally important.¹ Moreover, HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death for men in Prince George's County.² Effective preventive measures, including medically accurate counseling about condom use, are absolutely essential to prevent many more lives from being lost.

¹"Request for Qualifications," Prince George's County Hospital Authority, at 8-9.
<http://www.co.pg.md.us/Government/AgencyIndex/pg.cha&M.pdf>. (Accessed August 5, 2008.)

²"2003 Public Health QuickStats, Prince George's County, Maryland." <http://www.co.pg.md.us/Government/AgencyIndex/Health/pdf/QuickStats.pdf>. (Accessed August 5, 2008.)
Prince George's County Hospital Authority

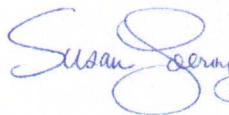
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Any organization that seeks to own and operate the Prince George's County health system must be prepared to meet the basic health care needs of county residents. The evaluation process must, therefore, screen out all bid proposals that fall short of meeting those needs.

Finally, we urge you to open the bid proposal review process to the public as far as is possible. The Open Meetings Act should be viewed as a floor for transparency, not a ceiling. We realize that while certain financial information provided by the bidders must remain confidential, policy issues contained in bid proposals should not. A full public discussion of those issues will maximize public trust in the Authority's final decision. Information in the final bids about the services offered and how they will be delivered should be made public in time for meaningful review and comment before the Authority makes any final decisions.

We look forward to a fruitful exchange of ideas during the bid evaluation process.

Sincerely yours,



Susan Goering
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union
of Maryland



Lowell Owens, President
American Civil Liberties Union
Prince George's County Maryland
Chapter