

Healy: Hospital battle not over

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A group of elected officials, clergy, community leaders and hospital workers rallied yesterday outside Greenville Hospital in Jersey City to denounce hospital management for rejecting a \$1.5 million infusion of cash from Jersey City.

Keeping a commitment made by Jersey City Mayor Jeramiah Healy at a state hearing on Nov. 1, the City Council voted earlier this month to give the hospital \$1.5 million — either as a grant or outright gift.

This money was made available with the proviso that LibertyHealth Systems Inc., Greenville's parent company, would keep the hospital open for at least six months — time enough to find a buyer who would keep it a medical facility.

But last week, LibertyHealth rejected the city's money and asked the state Health Planning Board, which granted the six-month postponement in No-

vember, to reconvene to grant the hospital permission to close.

"We've done everything we could to keep this facility open," said Jersey Mayor Jerramiah Healy, joined by roughly 25 other people.

"This battle is not over," Healy added. "We are going to continue to work to see if we can get a solid healthcare provider to come in here and provide ... to the people of Greenville and Jersey City what they need, which is a hospital."

LibertyHealth officials refused to comment yesterday beyond the contents of the letter they delivered last week to city officials rejecting the money.

In that letter, Brett Harwood, LibertyHealth's outgoing chairman, says LibertyHealth is turning down the money because the resolution passed by the city extends the six-month period to "June 2008" when six months from Nov. 1, the date of state hearing, is May 1.

Beyond this technicality, he adds, "The strains on LibertyHealth have only worsened as Greenville Hospital's losses have mounted."

LibertyHealth claims Greenville Hospital loses roughly \$3 million a year, and 85 percent of residents in the hospital's zip code already use other facilities, including the Jersey City Medical Center, which is also owned by LibertyHealth and is 2.8 miles away.

State Department of Health and Senior Services spokesman Tom Slater said yesterday the department is trying to arrange a meeting of the State Health Planning Board in response to LibertyHealth's request.

Greenville Hospital workers said yesterday the state carried out a "spot-check investigation" at the hospital on Friday, responding to a complaint that staffing levels are so low that the hospital is now no longer safe for patients. According to the workers, the hospital passed the inspection.

Slater confirmed state offi-



EMILY ANNE EPSTEIN JOURNAL PHOTO

PROTESTERS, including Assemblyman-elect Anthony Chiappone, left, outside Greenville Hospital as workers watch from the inside.

cials visited the hospital in response to an "anonymous complaint," but refused to elaborate further.

The hospital has 170 full- and part-time employees, plus an unspecified number of per

diem employees, LibertyHealth spokesman John McKeegan said yesterday.

Currently, 45 patients are hospitalized at the facility, he said. The hospital has 100 beds, but is staffed for 75.