

# Fulop asks: Is Medical Center next to close?



JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

**JERSEY CITY MEDICAL CENTER** is bracing for state aid cuts.

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A day after Greenville Hospital received its death sentence, Jersey City Councilman Steven Fulop warned that the state's proposed budget cuts could make Jersey City Medical Center the next to go under.

Speaking at a hearing of the state Senate Budget Committee in Gloucester County, Fulop said it's a possibility that JCMC could close "as early as this fall" due to a projected \$28.7 million funding deficit.

Hospital officials agreed with Fulop's concerns, but said that LibertyHealth Systems, the company that operates JCMC, has no plans to close the hospital. But officials did say that cuts in funding to cover uninsured patients could jeopardize some programs and services.

The state's reimbursement for charity care coverage at JCMC is slated to drop from an estimated \$83.5 million in the 2008 fiscal year to \$55.4 million in 2009, according to projections by the New Jersey Hospital Association.

Fulop pointed out that the hospital only saved \$2 million when it recently closed its pediatric unit. In addition, he said, \$34 million in supplemental state aid in last year's budget has not been included this year.

"You can't trim fat for \$34 million," Fulop said in a phone interview.

The councilman said that he hopes the two Hudson County senators on the budget committee — Brian Stack and Sandra B. Cunningham — can restore some of the funding for JCMC.

John McKeegan, a spokesman for LibertyHealth Systems, said the hospital cannot absorb the cuts proposed by the state.

"JCMC is being impacted by this much more than any other hospital in the state," he said. He added that JCMC only gets reimbursed for about half of what it spends on charity care patients.

A spokesman for Gov. Jon Corzine said the state Department of Health and Senior Services would have to address the hospital's specific situation, but noted the cuts in charity care are part of the governor's "across-the-board reductions."

"This is an austere budget," said spokesman Jim Gardner, but he added that the budget process is only beginning. "Certainly nothing is imminent."

He also said that Corzine's plan creates a "stabilization fund" that would aid the state's most distressed hospitals.

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