

Hospitals take Pascack Valley Hospital case to NJ Supreme Court

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Two hospitals are taking their legal battle against the reopening of Pascack Valley Hospital to the state Supreme Court, saying the state health commissioner's call for a new hospital in Bergen County is "unlawful and unprecedented."

In a strongly worded suit, The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood and Englewood Hospital and Medical Center claim politics are at play and asked the court to stop the Health Department's "flagrant abuse" of the licensing process.

"By filing this appeal, we are asking the New Jersey State Supreme Court to ensure a rational, deliberate and apolitical way to develop healthcare services," Valley officials said in a prepared statement.

Hackensack University Medical Center is seeking to open a 128-bed acute care hospital at the site of the former Westwood hospital.

The suit was filed late Monday in response to two judges of the Appellate Division of state Superior Court who denied motions last month by Valley and Englewood for permission to appeal the state's call for applications. It names the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Poonam Alaigh in her former capacity as health commissioner and Hackensack University Medical Center.

Alaigh issued the call in February for a new acute care hospital in Bergen County.

The suit claims that "the true impetus behind this call appears to be political pressure arising out of the recent election campaign of Governor Christie, who supported HUMC's efforts to reopen PVH during his run for office and publicly reiterated that commitment again this year. Absent this explanation, the DHSS' decision to issue the call defies all reason."

Donna Leusner, a spokeswoman for the Health Department, declined to comment about the case. "The Health Department does not comment on pending litigation," she said.

Hackensack plans to file its application by the June 1 deadline, said Nancy Radwin, an HUMC spokeswoman.

"Our focus continues to be on meeting the community health care needs in the Pascack and Northern Valley regions. As planned on June 1st, we will submit our certificate of

need application to open a new general hospital in Bergen County," she said. "Our primary mission is to provide these communities with the highest quality of care. Our commitment to this project is unwavering and we look forward to presenting our strong case during the upcoming process."

Once it files, the state Health Planning Board will consider it and recommend action to the state health commissioner, who will ultimately decide whether to approve or reject it. The State Health Planning Board is to complete its consideration by Nov. 3.

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