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LSU Is Well Prepared for Flu Outbreak LSU Hospitals | 05.04.09

Baton Rouge (May 4, 2009) -- The LSU Health System Health Care Services Division (HCSD) has been actively planning for at least two years within its system of seven hospitals and clinics and with its state and federal partners for a pandemic flu outbreak and has maintained stockpiles of necessary medical supplies.

Additionally, LSU is currently engaging in the following activities:

- Implemented surveillance strategies in all HCSD hospitals and clinics for immediate isolation and testing of patients with influenza-like illness.
- Working with its existing patient help line, 1.877.LSU.TALK (1.877.578.8255), to give the public appropriate health information related to swine flu (H1N1 virus) and to ensure adequate staffing for increased call volume.
- Disseminating swine flu informational fact sheets within all facilities.
- Updated its website with swine flu link to helpful information: www.lsuhs.org.
- Emphasizing infection control practices among all health care employees.
- Holding system-wide meetings multiple times per week as needed to share information and ensure consistency with regard to response and readiness.
- Participating in state Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control managed conference calls for the latest information.
- Reviewing pandemic flu protocols and pandemic emergency plan for readiness.

The hope is this flu virus does not spread, but LSU has processes in place to support its communities should the outbreak become worse. Louisiana residents are an important part of the LSU Health System's preparedness efforts.

"We take the threat of swine flu seriously, but we know we can greatly reduce the incidence of infection by practicing good health habits we should always employ," said Dr. Michael Butler, HCSD CEO.

These practices include the following common-sense precautions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- If you are sick, stay home from work or school.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms seek the care of a health care professional.
- Patients who suspect they might have a case of swine flu should first call their physicians' office.
- It is strongly urged that patients do not go to hospital emergency rooms unless they are experiencing severe signs of illness. This will help prevent the spread of the virus.

The LSU Health System - Health Care Services Division is one of the largest public health care delivery systems in the country. It has over 35,000 inpatient admissions, nearly 196,000 inpatient days, 515,500 outpatient clinic visits, 894,000 outpatient encounters, and nearly 244,000 emergency department visits. Each year nearly 500 residents and fellows from the LSU and Tulane Schools of Medicine and Ochsner Health System and 2,200 nurses and allied health students from many colleges and universities are trained in LSU facilities.

LSU is the largest single provider of uncompensated inpatient care in Louisiana. LSU HCSD hospitals have an economic impact of over \$1.4 billion in asset business activity, \$568 million in personal earnings, and generate over 12,000 jobs.

For more information, contact Marvin McGraw, Director of Communications and Media Relations, LSU Health Care Services Division, 225.279.4744 or mmcgra@lsuhsc.edu or Michael Higgins, 225.922.0798 or mhiggi@lsuhsc.edu.

<http://www.lsuhs hospitals.org/News/2009/swineflu-1.html>

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**7 confirmed swine flu cases in La.
The Associated Press | 05.03.09**

(AP) — BATON ROUGE, La. - The swine flu has spread to Louisiana and seven children in three parishes are the state's first confirmed cases, state health officials said Sunday.

Gov. Bobby Jindal's office said five of the cases were in Lafayette Parish. Ascension and Orleans parishes also had a confirmed case. Jindal said health officials had expected that the Centers for Disease Control would confirm that the H1N1 virus would spread to Louisiana.

"This is not a huge surprise, but it does confirm some of our earlier suspicions," Jindal said at a news conference.

All the children are recovering at home and taking antiviral medicine, he said.

The Lafayette cases were students at Cathedral Carmel School, a kindergarten through eighth grade school, which closed last week. Another Lafayette-area private school, St. Thomas More, said it would not open Monday-the fifth to shut down in the parish due to flu concerns.

St. Thomas More officials decided to close at the recommendation of state health officials, who found a "direct link" to Mexico, Jindal said.

Audubon Charter School, a private New Orleans school, planned to close Monday for three days to disinfect classrooms, furniture and equipment. Jindal said a student who had traveled to Mexico in January might have contracted the virus. The student was not in school last week and is responding well to antiviral medicine, Jindal said.

Jindal said state labs have 800 samples to test for connections to the virus, and over 380 have been tested. Of the 800 samples, 121 are from Lafayette, with 68 pending; 14 are from Ascension, six pending; and 42 are from Orleans, with 33 pending.

The CDC now has 16 samples from Louisiana to test for swine flu, Jindal said.

On the Net:

www.flula.com

<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/index.ssf?/base/national-11/1241376055325430.xml&storylist=louisiana>

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7 La. schoolchildren in 3 parishes have virus **The Advocate | 05.03.09**

Gov. Bobby Jindal said Sunday that seven Louisiana schoolchildren in three parishes tested positive for human swine influenza, the state's first confirmed cases of the virus.

Testing at the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta confirmed five cases in Lafayette Parish, one in Ascension Parish and one in Orleans Parish, he said.

All seven children are being treated at home with anti-viral medication and are responding well, Jindal said.

Louisiana has another 16 suspected cases — seven adults and nine children — and those samples have been sent to the CDC for testing, Jindal said.

State health officials sent two additional samples to the CDC Sunday, bringing the total sent to the agency to 25, Jindal said. Nine of those have been tested, with two coming back negative for swine flu, he said.

The two samples that tested negative were from in St. Tammany and St. Martin parishes. Jindal said that both of those cases were in older people who did not have a link to Mexico.

It will take between two and four days to get the results on the remaining 16 samples, state officials said.

Jindal said the five confirmed cases in Lafayette Parish are all students at Cathedral-Carmel School, which closed voluntarily on Wednesday.

The governor said state officials believe there was a cluster of infections at five parochial schools in Lafayette Parish, including Cathedral-Carmel, because of the intermingling of students between schools.

St. Pius and Our Lady of Fatima closed voluntarily Friday. State officials Saturday announced that Ascension Episcopal would not open today.

Jindal also announced on Sunday the closure of St. Thomas More High School because a student with flulike symptoms attended school on Friday. That student has a sibling who attends Cathedral-Carmel and is a suspected case.

Jindal dubbed the closure “an aggressive but necessary step” to curb the further spread of swine flu in the Lafayette area.

The state recommended that the schools close for up to 14 days, or when the last student diagnosed with the disease is symptom free.

State health officials are monitoring the 10 Lafayette-area day-care centers that watch siblings of students who attend the affected schools, Jindal said.

The Ascension Parish case is a student at Lake Elementary School and the Orleans Parish case is a student at Audubon Charter School in New Orleans, Jindal said. No other students at those schools appear to have flulike symptoms, he said.

The 8-year-old Orleans Parish student went to Mexico in January and has been in contact with people who have recently traveled there, Jindal said. The student has been out of school since Wednesday, Jindal said.

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Audubon Charter School is closing voluntarily until Thursday so the facility can be disinfected, Jindal said.

State epidemiologists have not found a connection between the 10-year-old Ascension Parish student and Mexico, he said.

Lake Elementary School will remain open, Jindal said.

Johnnie W. Balfantz, a spokesman for the Ascension Parish school system, said a professional cleaning company was contracted to disinfect the school Sunday.

Some are questioning why so much attention is focused on swine flu when there are only 244 confirmed cases in the U.S. and 937 cases worldwide.

Thousands of people are infected with the seasonal flu in Louisiana each year, Jindal said. "It's important to be aggressive, but it's also important to keep this in perspective."

Dr. Fred Lopez, an LSU infectious disease professor and practicing physician, said that it is important to note that 35,000 to 40,000 people die of the seasonal flu each year in the U.S.

Some reasons why the CDC, the World Health Organization and local health officials are taking this virus so seriously is because no one is immune to it and there is no vaccine for it, Lopez said. But there are other aspects of this viral strain that are also unknown and make it dangerous, Lopez said.

H1N1 is a mixture of three flu strains from pigs, humans and birds, Lopez said, which is another factor that makes it different. "It's just a genetic re-assortment of these flu viruses that are derived from three different groups," he said. "And it's just novel; it's a new strain. That's also what's so difficult about it."

Lopez said in the early days of the outbreak, doctors were watching to see if this viral strain had the ability to readily pass from person to person.

"It's already proven that it is transmissible human to human within at least several communities," he said.

Lopez said he believes there will be more cases, including some that will be severe and require hospitalization. "Right now the questions I have are: will this return in the fall and, if so, will there be a vaccine," he said.

Lopez said it usually takes about six months to come up with a vaccine. "It's not a minimal venture to pursue a new strain-based virus," he said. "The seasonal flu vaccines have been in development for next season. This would be an additional vaccine if it is developed."

Advocate and WBRZ staff reports
2:30 p.m.

State officials announced today that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed seven cases of swine flu in three Louisiana parishes.

"Five of the cases the CDC and Prevention confirmed for the H1N1 flu (swine flu) virus are in Lafayette Parish, one is in Ascension Parish and one is in Orleans Parish," according to a news release from the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness or GOHSEP.

The five confirmed cases in Lafayette Parish are all students at Cathedral Carmel School, which closed voluntarily on Wednesday.

Gov. Bobby Jindal said Saturday that state officials believed there was a cluster outbreak in four parochial schools in Lafayette Parish, including Cathedral Carmel, because of the intermingling of students between the schools.

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The state recommended that the four schools close for up to 14 days, or when the last student diagnosed with the disease is symptom free.

Besides Cathedral Carmel, the schools closed are: St. Pius, Our Lady of Fatima, and Ascension Episcopal.

The Ascension Parish case is a student at Lake Elementary School and the Orleans Parish case is a student at Audubon Charter School in New Orleans, according to the news release.

The Orleans Parish student has a direct link to Mexico but the Ascension Parish student does not, according to the news release.

The schools in Orleans and Ascension parishes will remain open, according to the news release, because the two students were treated at home for several days and no other students appear to have flu-like symptoms, the news release stated.

So far, the CDC has tested nine of the 23 samples sent to the agency by Louisiana. Two of the nine samples tested negative for swine flu.

It will take between two and four days to get the results on the remaining 14 samples, state officials said.

The two samples that tested negative are from St. Tammany and St. Martin parishes.

The news release said that both of those cases were in older people who did not have a link to Mexico.

All seven people with the confirmed cases of swine flu are being treated at home with one of two anti-viral medications — Tamiflu and Relenza.

“We have been treating every suspect case as if it could be the H1N1 virus and have acted appropriately to recommend school closures when necessary,” said Alan Levine, secretary of the state Department of Health and Hospitals.

2 p.m. By LUKE MARGOLIS WBRZ Reporter

Seven cases of H1N1 (swine flu) have been confirmed in Louisiana by the Center for Disease Control, WBRZ has learned.

Gov. Bobby Jindal will hold a press conference at 2:30 p.m. on the cases.

Five of the cases are in Lafayette parish, one is in Orleans parish and the seventh is in Ascension parish.

The Ascension parish case involves a student at Lake Elementary School. State officials have advised Lake Elementary school that it can remain open because the student involved has been absent for a while and no other students are showing symptoms at this time.

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/44263647.html?showAll=y&c=y>

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**Briefing Book: State mulls hospital sell-off
Times – Picayune | 05.03.09**

During the same session that lawmakers must consider a budget that calls for closing the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, they also will mull allowing the state to sell portions of the Southeast Louisiana Hospital campus. That is the Mandeville mental health facility slated to absorb the 35 inpatient beds now at NOAH. The measure by Sen. Jack Donahue, R-Mandeville, prompted some concerns from New Orleans mental health advocates that state health officials are contemplating privatization of the facility. Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Alan Levine said that is not the case. "Southeast sits on 1,500 or so acres in the fastest growing corridor of the parish," he said. "The parish government approached us about potentially, at some point, swapping land and building the state a new, state-of-the-art facility on a different piece of property. There is no agreement on this, and the bill simply is permissive. If this were to pass, I'd say it would be years before any of this would be done, if at all." Separately, Levine's department is moving ahead with its proposal to privatize operations of the John J. Hainkel Home and Rehabilitation Center on Henry Clay Avenue in Uptown.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-7/1241328032271210.xml&coll=1&thispage=2>

Briefing Book: Levine stands by his plan
Times – Picayune | 05.03.09

In a written response to New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, state health Secretary Alan Levine stands by his plan to close the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital and move its inpatient mental health services to a Mandeville facility. Levine deflected Nagin's assertions that the state had been unresponsive to his requests for information about the plan. Levine documented that the only written inquiry before Nagin's letter was an e-mail from city health director Dr. Kevin Stephens. Levine said he responded "that same day," only to go nine additional days before getting Stephens' reply. Levine said his department returned a telephone call from the Nagin administration but did not hear back. "Notwithstanding our attempts to reach your office, we have shared the very data you reference at virtually every meeting we have attended, including public meetings," Levine wrote. "We will be happy to share it with you as well." Levine also met with three members of the New Orleans City Council about city health care issues. Levine used his letter to chide Nagin about unfilled vacancies on the board for the Metropolitan Human Services District, the entity that directs outpatient mental health care in the region. "In order for the MHSD to thrive, it must have proper oversight and a qualified board," Levine wrote. "We would be grateful if you would fill the remaining positions."

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/44207082.html?showAll=y&c=y>

State news release on swine flu for Sunday, May 3
The Daily Advertiser | 05.03.09

BATON ROUGE - Governor Jindal and state officials held a press conference today to discuss the seven cases the CDC has confirmed for the H1N1 virus in Louisiana, and the two cases that tested negative for the virus.

Of the nine initial samples the state first sent to the CDC for confirmation of the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, the CDC has now confirmed seven of the cases are the H1N1 virus. The cases in St. Tammany and St. Martin Parish tested negative for the H1N1 Virus.

Governor Jindal said all seven of the confirmed cases are at home and being treated on antivirals.

Five of the CDC-confirmed cases are in Lafayette, and one is from New Orleans and one from Ascension Parish.

The Governor said state labs have now received a total of 800 samples to test for connections to the H1N1 virus. More than 380 have been tested as of today.

Of the 800 total in state labs, 121 cases are from Lafayette and 68 are pending; 14 are from Ascension and six of those are pending; and 42 cases are from New Orleans, with 33 of those pending. DHH is expediting the testing of samples for parishes that have CDC-confirmed H1N1 cases.

CDC-CONFIRMED H1N1 CASES

- * Lafayette Parish - 5
- * Orleans - 1
- * Ascension - 1

SUSPECTED H1N1 CASES

- * Lafayette Parish - 12
- * Orleans - 1
- * Beauregard - 1
- * St. Landry - 1
- * Iberia Parish - 1

CDC-NEGATIVE H1N1 CASES

- * St. Martin - 1
- * St. Tammany - 1

LAFAYETTE CASES

Governor Jindal said the five cases in Lafayette are students from Cathedral Carmel School, which the state closed Wednesday, based on our surveillance of students there with flu-like illness. In addition, St. Pius and Our Lady of Fatima closed voluntarily due to their connection with these students.

Yesterday, the state announced the closure of Ascension Episcopal School on Johnston Street in Lafayette. Due to the large overlap of activity and contact between students at these schools, DHH recommended these schools remain closed for up to 14 days or until 24 hours after the last child experiences flu-like symptoms.

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DHH will provide further guidance to these impacted schools based on CDC's instructions, and in accordance with what epidemiologists on the ground find from their investigations. The state has been in contact with the superintendents of these schools, and they are in agreement with the closure recommendations and will remain closed along the CDC-recommended timeframe.

ST. THOMAS MORE HIGH SCHOOL CLOSURE

The Governor announced today that the state has recommended the closure of St. Thomas More Catholic High School (STM) in Lafayette, which has a direct connection to Cathedral Carmel and a specific suspect case there. The school has agreed to close for the CDC-recommended timeframe of up to 14 days or until 24 hours after the last child shows flu-like symptoms.

Epidemiologists have determined that a student at STM who was at school as recently as Friday is a sibling of a Cathedral Carmel student who is a suspected case of the H1N1 virus, pending with the CDC. The Governor said that state officials recommended the closure of STM after an investigation into the connections at Cathedral Carmel and factoring in the five CDC-confirmed cases at that school.

Governor Jindal said, "We are continuing to take aggressive action to prevent the spread of illness wherever possible. In some cases, this means we will close schools, especially in the Lafayette area where we now have five confirmed H1N1 cases and a direct connection to Mexico, along with a high amount of comingling of students between these different private schools."

The Governor added that, "Because the state already acted as if these cases were positive, we are exactly where we need to be now to continue to track these students and look for any other connections in the community - including day care facilities linked to these schools - so we can prevent the further spread of illness wherever possible."

State officials encourage school principals and teachers to be vigilant about monitoring students for any influenza-like symptoms. If students demonstrate symptoms, their parents should be notified, they should not attend class, and they should consult with, and follow the advice of, their physicians. School officials should notify their local health department if students do demonstrate flu-like illness, so each circumstance may be reviewed as appropriate.

NEW ORLEANS CASE

Governor Jindal said that the positive confirmation the state received for the H1N1 virus in Orleans Parish is case involving a student at Audubon Charter School in New Orleans, who is being treated at home and responding well to the antiviral medicines. This student traveled to Mexico in January and had been around people who had traveled to Mexico recently.

Audubon Charter School voluntarily decided to close the school for three days today - from Monday through Wednesday, after receiving the confirmation from the CDC. The school said they are closing out of an abundance of caution, and in order to give them time to thoroughly clean the school before students return.

The Governor said that state officials did consider closing this school yesterday after identifying the suspected case there, but decided not to recommend its closure because the student has been home sick since seeing the doctor Wednesday and there were not any other suspect cases at that school, at this time.

ASCENSION PARISH CASE

Governor Jindal said the seventh confirmation of the H1N1 virus the state got back from the CDC today is a student at Lake Elementary School in Ascension Parish. This child went home from school Monday and has not returned to school.

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The Governor said that the state did consider closing this school also, in accordance with CDC guidelines to consider closure, but this child has been at home for almost a week and there are not currently other suspect cases at the school.

State health officials remain in close contact with the school and they are monitoring student absences and communicating with parents to look for signs of illness in their children.

NEGATIVE CASES REPORTED FROM CDC

The two negative test results the CDC informed the state of today relate to cases in St. Tammany and St. Martin Parish. Both of these cases involve older individuals, not students.

NEW SUSPECT CASES

As of today, Governor Jindal said, DHH has reported two new suspect cases to the CDC for confirmation of the H1N1 virus, bringing the total number of suspect cases in the state to 16. This total includes the reduction of the nine cases the state has received results on, plus the addition of the two new cases reported to the CDC today.

Governor Jindal said the two new suspect cases include a child in New Iberia in Iberia Parish, and an older individual in Opelousas in St. Landry Parish.

211 LINE ACTIVE

In closing, the Governor announced that the state has activated the 211 statewide information and referral phone network to help people throughout the state get information on the H1N1 virus, how it is affecting their area and how they can take measures to prevent the spread of illness. Operators are being updated as the state reports additional information on the virus.

PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY

Make sure you:

- * Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- * Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- * Avoid close contact with sick people.
- * If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Symptoms of the H1N1 virus (swine flu) include:

- * Fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.
- * If you are experiencing these symptoms - Consult your doctor as soon as possible.

Visit www.FluLa.com for the latest information on the H1N1 virus.
<http://www.theadvertiser.com/article/20090503/NEWS01/90503018>

Video: Jindal Press Conference: Flu Update
<http://www.theadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=videonetwork&videoID=1112291085>

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Hospital plan fails to account for Blood Center
Posted by Letters to the Editor May 04, 2009 1:26AM

The latest designs for the LSU/VA hospital complex fail to illustrate that an established part of our community's health care system may be left in the rubble.

The Blood Center's lab occupies the corner of Tulane Avenue and Galvez Street, on property that is on the edge of the planned footprint of the new LSU hospital complex.

We have invested millions of dollars in our state-of-the-art facility for the benefit of the medical community. We supply blood and blood components, and we believe our services should remain at their present location.

Our location would facilitate the new hospitals by having our blood services immediately available. It would be extremely wasteful to destroy our facility and pay to move it to another location.

We hope that the participants involved realize that it would be very costly for the region's primary blood provider to be relocated while preserving the ability to serve the community's blood needs with no down time. The Blood Center would like to work toward a mutual solution.

Billy Weales
President & CEO
The Blood Center
New Orleans

http://blog.nola.com/letterstotheeditor/2009/05/hospital_plan_fails_to_account.html

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Preservationists sue over New Orleans hospital plan

The Advocate | 05.02.09

By ALLEN M. JOHNSON JR.

NEW ORLEANS — A congressionally chartered preservationist organization filed suit Friday in Washington, D.C., accusing federal agencies of failing to consider the “adverse effects” of building a new LSU teaching hospital and a VA hospital in New Orleans.

Filed in a District of Columbia federal court, the suit by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States names both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Federal Emergency Management Agency and their respective administrators as defendants.

The suit accuses both FEMA and VA of violating federally mandated rules for considering the impact of building the proposed LSU Academic Medical Center and a neighboring VA Medical Center.

The complaint seeks an order halting “any funds” and “all construction-related activities on the proposed adjacent” hospital sites near downtown New Orleans.

The suit comes at a time when Gov. Bobby Jindal’s administration is seeking \$493 million in FEMA disaster reimbursements to help fund \$1.2 billion for the state’s share of a proposed LSU/VA medical complex.

Both the state and the city have said the construction of the two new hospitals would replace both storm-damaged Charity Hospital and the VA Medical Center in downtown, and help revive the city’s economy, damaged when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.

The National Trust suit alleges the 67-acre site chosen for LSU/VA project would require bulldozing 25 square blocks, containing 165 historic properties in the Mid-City Historic District, including homes renovated by their owners after Katrina.

Overall, the suit alleges, the project would require the demolition of approximately 265 residential housing units and the displacement of 600 people, 85 percent of whom are minorities and 40 percent who are living below the federal poverty line.

The suit requests that a court stop any “site selection, property acquisition, site preparation, demolition and construction, until the VA and FEMA have fully complied with their legal duties” to consider the environmental, historical and cultural impact of the hospital project.

“Bulldozing a historic neighborhood in New Orleans in order to build these two medical centers is wrong, both legally and morally,” Richard Moe, president of the National Trust, a 235,000-member organization chartered by Congress in 1949. “There are other sites that would bring state-of-the-art medical care to the community faster and for less money, without destroying Mid-City ... We hope this lawsuit will lead VA and FEMA to go back and revisit the less destructive options.”

Preservationists, neighborhood groups and others have supported restoring state-owned Charity Hospital and building a new VA hospital on the site of flood-damaged Lindy Boggs Medical Center in Mid-City.
<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/44207072.html>

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Preservation group sues to block hospital projects

The Times-Picayune | 05.01.09

by Bill Barrow

Accusing the federal government of violating its own planning laws, a historic preservation group wants a court to block land acquisition and construction for the joint Veterans Affairs and state teaching hospitals slated to be built in lower Mid-City.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation filed its 23-page complaint this afternoon in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. It names the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Federal Emergency Management Agency as defendants.

FEMA is involved because the state plans to help pay for its portion of the project using its yet-to-be-determined federal reimbursement for Hurricane Katrina damage to Charity Hospital.

Should the D.C. court side with the plaintiffs, hospital construction would be delayed significantly, though not necessarily derailed or steered away from the current site across Claiborne Avenue from downtown.

The VA plans to open its hospital in 2012. Architects for the state tout a 2013 opening, though financing questions remain for the estimated \$1.2 billion venture.

The lawsuit hinges on how a court interprets the National Environmental Policy Act, a wide-ranging 1969 law that governs how federal agencies conduct their construction projects.

The suit alleges that the VA and FEMA erred when they, along with the city of New Orleans, declared as part of the federal review that the hospitals would yield "no significant impact" on the neighborhood.

That maneuver allowed the agencies to streamline and compartmentalize the planning process into tiers, such as the current "design phase" marked by recent public sessions held only to comment on schematic designs.

The National Trust asserts that the agencies dismissed alternative sites proposed inadequate measures to mitigate negative effects; and have given insufficient consideration to the future of the existing Charity Hospital and VA buildings.

The National Trust wants the court to force the agencies to follow a more involved, wide-ranging review yielding an "Environmental Impact Statement" that considers all of those factors.

FEMA spokesman Clark Stephens said the agency does not comment on pending litigation. The VA did not immediately respond to an inquiry about the lawsuit.

A spokesman at the state facilities office, which is managing the teaching hospital planning along with the Louisiana State University System, said officials in Baton Rouge are confident the project complies with the law.

Michael DiResto noted that state and federal preservation officers, included as participants in the planning, have endorsed the project.

The National Trust is among more than 50 organizations asking Gov. Bobby Jindal to seek a third-party review of whether it is feasible for the state gut Charity and rebuild within its shell. Advocates of that scenario suggest that the VA could then build on the lower portion of the proposed footprint, sparing the parcels that reach further into Mid-City.

http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2009/05/preservation_group_sues_to_blo.html

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