

Bankruptcy Looms for Coleman Park

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BRIDGEPORT — A Coleman Street nursing home is threatening to close its doors over budget deficits and insufficient Medicaid reimbursement.

Officials of the New Coleman Park Health and Rehabilitation Center on Monday notified the state and the home's employees that a notice of intent to close the 100-bed facility has been filed with the state Department of Social Services.

The nursing home claims insufficient Medicaid reimbursements have caused \$1 million deficits in each of the past three years, making it impossible to continue operations.

"We purchased the facility in hopes it could become financially viable," said Carla Ward, the nursing home administrator, in a letter to employees distributed Monday.

"Unfortunately, and in spite of our best efforts, this has not happened," she wrote.

The notice of intent to close is the first step in what could be a lengthy process. Unless financial arrangements are made with the state, troubled nursing homes often end up in state receivership and then sold to new owners.

Coleman Park went through that process in 2003 when the previous owners sought to close the facility amid allegations that management was keeping employee co-payments for health insurance while not providing coverage.

The nursing home was taken over by the state and sold to Chaim Stern, who also operates Bridgeport Manor and Bridgeport Health Center, as well as a nursing home in Waterbury.

The letter of intent to close relates only to Coleman Park.

Employees and union leaders Thursday criticized the state for failing to help the struggling facility.

Deborah Chernoff, a spokeswoman for New England Health Care Employees Union, Local 1199, said more than 95 percent of Coleman Park's residents rely on Medicaid to pay for their care, the highest percentage in the state.

"The nursing home has been experiencing significant losses due to a Medicaid shortfall," Chernoff said.

Others worried about what would happen if the nursing home closed.

"Where else are we supposed to go?" said Christin Whitfield, a Coleman Park resident who spoke during a rally Thursday in front of the facility.

"When I first came here I didn't know everyone. But it's been like a family to me," Whitfield said as some residents openly wept over the possibility of losing their home.

David Dearborn, a spokesman for the state DSS, said Coleman Park has been granted several Medicaid rate increases during the past few years. He said the Medicaid reimbursement rate for Coleman is \$30 per patient over the state average and \$14 per-patient above the Fairfield County average.

He confirmed the nursing home reported losses in 2006 and 2007, and that a rate increase request is now pending before state officials.

"We have kept this home open and provided rate increases. But we will analyze this again," Dearborn said. "The department has taken steps to support New Coleman over the years."

State Reps. Christopher Caruso and Andres Ayala, and state Sen. Edwin Gomes, all Bridgeport Democrats, attended the rally and pledged to support the nursing home.

"We will do everything we can to support you and the patients of this facility," Caruso said.