

<http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/newsroom/detail/2714>

BATON ROUGE - The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals joined St. Tammany Parish leaders and area legislators today to announce a final agreement allowing the parish to use the property at Southeast Louisiana Hospital in Mandeville, with Meridian Behavioral Health Services assuming control of inpatient beds at the hospital and outpatient services on the property continuing.

"Our commitment has always been to maintain services through this transition, and this agreement is a perfect example our ability to work closely with local officials and other partners to deliver health care services more efficiently and better tailored to that community's needs," said DHH Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein. "With local governance and Meridian's expertise, we are confident that this will be a smooth transition and a better pathway for sustainable mental health services in the area."

In July, the State announced plans to cease operations at Southeast in response to Congress sharply reducing Federal Medical Assistance Percentage funding for the Medicaid program. Those plans called for the continued operation of these services through agreements with private providers.

The State has now signed an agreement giving St. Tammany Parish the authority to manage all property at Southeast, and has signed an agreement for Meridian to operate 58 psychiatric inpatient beds - 42 youth and 16 adult. A separate agreement between St. Tammany Parish and Meridian allows Meridian to operate these 58 beds on the Southeast campus. These agreements will also allow the current outpatient and group home services providers on the Southeast campus to remain in place. Meridian will begin operating these beds at Southeast effective Jan. 2, 2013. DHH will discontinue all management of Southeast effective Jan 1, 2013.

Meridian will give hiring preference to current Southeast employees where comparable jobs are available, and has already begun the process of interviewing employees.

"We are incredibly pleased that after five months of hard work we are moving forward with a

solution for Southeast Louisiana Hospital," said Pat Brister, St. Tammany Parish President. "This is a solution that continues to provide necessary services to this Parish and the Northshore, as well as keeps hundreds of jobs in this community. This is a great thing for St. Tammany Parish, but in the end, the patients and families of those that desperately need those services will benefit the most."

"Southeast is a valuable part of our community that provides needed mental health services, and it is also a vital piece of our local economy," said State Sen. Jack Donahue, R-Mandeville. "I'm pleased with this outcome, which keeps the hospital open, keeps jobs in our parish and is a better value for the taxpayers."

"Meridian Behavioral Health Services [MBHS] is proud to provide high quality behavioral health care services to patients and their families in the Southeast region of Louisiana," said Wesley Mason, CEO, Meridian Behavioral Health Systems. "MBHS is excited to expand operations into Louisiana and help meet the needs of adolescents and adults where behavioral services are definitely needed, including acute care and youth residential services."

"This transition brings on a strong partner, Meridian, who will help us maintain safety net behavioral health care services in St. Tammany Parish while assuming more control at the local level," said State Rep. Tim Burns, R-Mandeville.

The State is currently finalizing arrangements with two other providers - Community Care Hospital and River Oaks Hospital -- to expand existing bed capacity in New Orleans through beds previously housed at Southeast. Community Care Hospital will operate eight beds for adults and River Oaks Hospital will operate eight youth beds at their existing facilities effective Jan. 2, 2013.

The State has also entered an agreement with Washington-St. Tammany Hospital in Bogalusa to operate eight adult beds on their campus.

Overall, this series of agreements maintains the State's inpatient psychiatric bed capacity.

In October, DHH transferred 94 patient beds that were previously at Southeast to East Louisiana Mental Health System (34) and Central Louisiana State Hospital (60), and several staff members previously employed at Southeast accepted jobs at these two hospitals.

The State has increased and eased access to behavioral health care services statewide with the launch of the Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership in March. The Partnership operates one central hotline - 1-800-424-4399 - that residents can call to find mental health or addiction treatment providers near them.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals strives to protect and promote health statewide and to ensure access to medical, preventive and rehabilitative services for all state citizens. To learn more about DHH, visit <http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/> . For up-to-date health information, news and emergency updates, follow DHH's blog at <http://www.myhealthla.org/> , Twitter at http://twitter.com/La_Health_Dept and search for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals on Facebook.