

Good morning madam chair, members Parvin, Lopez, Lavere, and Gorrell, CEO Johnson and, of course, the public... Buenos dias para ustedes tambien...

I am Dr. Gabino Aguirre, former mayor and life-time resident of Santa Paula. On behalf of the fifty thousand plus residents of the Santa Clara River Valley, I'd like to express our appreciation for your efforts to establish a new, state-of-the-art, hospital facility to replace ours that will be closing in a few short years. We've been here before. After the Santa Paula Community Hospital declared bankruptcy in 2003, our community was devastated but we worked together with you which resulted with its purchase by the county. So today, here we are again, working together with you to plan for and replace our soon to be closed hospital. Bottom line: It's about saving lives and fulfilling our moral and legal obligations.

But, as they say, there's trouble in paradise. It seems the proposed hospital may fall short due to the exclusion of the obstetrics and intensive care units. This is bad news for our valley and here are some reasons why:

1. Closing obstetrics and intensive care services in our valley will have serious impacts on the indigent, farmworkers, children, the elderly and others facing health challenges. This lack of local access compounds existing obstacles including financial limitations, language barriers, and transportation issues.
2. Obstetrics and ICUs are crucial for addressing high-risk pregnancies, complications during childbirth, and life-threatening medical emergencies. Without access to these services, valley residents will face increased risks and poorer health outcomes compared to those in urban areas. Closing obstetrics services will negatively impact prenatal care, childbirth safety, and postnatal care for vulnerable populations thereby raising the spectre of increased maternal and infant mortality rates and higher rates of preventable complications.
3. Relocating the OB and ICU units to Ventura shifts revenue-generating services out of the valley thereby diminishing immediate and long-term financial viability of our hospital and healthcare. This is unacceptable! Let's work together like we did in 2004 to maintain equitable healthcare services for the valley.

Let's "bring home" the 600+ babies born to valley mothers every year. Doing so will increase general fund dollars to maintain our safety net. I ask the ladies in the house: "Would you choose to travel out of town for delivery which you know may endanger your life and that of your child? For expectant valley mothers, the answer is obvious: they'll choose Santa Paula Hospital! Let's recognize that our lives are at stake here and we expect this Board to exercise leadership to resolve this predicament.

To conclude, we are thankful for all personnel who serve the Santa Clara Valley for their dedication and commitment to provide excellent healthcare services. They are an important factor in providing equitable access to healthcare. Let's not forget that healthcare is a human right and a matter of social justice. Eliminating or reducing services perpetuates systemic inequalities and further marginalizes already disadvantaged communities. Today is a good day to do the right thing. Thank you.