

## Governor talks health care issues at Mercedes

By Neal Vickers, Birmingham Political Buzz Examiner

Tuscaloosa remains at the center of a debate in Montgomery affecting the care of mental patients across the state of Alabama. While visiting a new Mercedes supply company plant in Vance Friday, Governor Robert Bentley said he is hoping to soon to make a decision about the revamping of mental health system in Alabama.

"We're modernizing the way we treat mental illness in this state and we're going to continue to do that," says Bentley.

When asked about [the decision](#) to halt the construction of a new \$81-million 230 facility to replace Bryce Mental Hospital, he said the decision of building a structure anywhere has yet to be made.

Why did they wait until they had a project underway to rethink that decision?

"I had to make the decision before it got too far along," Bentley said. "It had to do with the location and the fact that we are trying to revitalize that part of the city of Tuscaloosa, especially Alberta City," Bentley said. He said they felt the hospital would not be an asset to the area.

The plan was to have new facility as the sole state mental hospital by mid-2013 to hold people found not guilty because of insanity or mental defect or deemed incompetent to stand trial. It would replace Bryce and the Taylor Hardin medical facility. They were also closing several other facilities statewide due to the state budget crisis.

Following the [tornado disaster](#) last April, the city of Tuscaloosa drew up a plan to try and improve the image of some of the Tuscaloosa communities, including Alberta City.

State Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh says they still think [the best way](#) to efficiently manage the state's mental health system is to move most patients out of state-run hospitals and into local community facilities. She says it costs an average of \$140,000 a year to hospitalize a patient, while community-based care is costs less than half that amount.

"We're still going to do as much as we can to build up the infrastructure for out-patients that have mental illness," Bentley said Friday. "That is the trend of where we are going. But whether or not we need a major facility in the state of Alabama, that decision has not been reached."

He says if they decide they do need a major facility, he wants it built somewhere in Tuscaloosa.



The Department of Mental Health is reviewing previous successes in the modernization of mental health care, and the best practices observed will be implemented in the coming months. - AL Dept of Mental Health

**Credits:** Alabama Department of Mental Health



**Location:** Bryce Hospital

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