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Bentley suspends mental health closure plan

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MONTGOMERY | Gov. Robert Bentley said Wednesday that construction of the replacement psychiatric hospital for Bryce Hospital has been suspended and that the Department of Mental Health's plan to close four mental health hospitals also is on hold.

Bentley, speaking outside a meeting of the state Mental Health Advisory Board, said the new psychiatric hospital, which had been under construction on the campus of the former Partlow Developmental Center in Tuscaloosa, might never be built.



Tuscaloosa News / Michelle Lepianka Carter
Construction work has been halted on the new Bryce Hospital on the former Partlow campus in Tuscaloosa.

He said the suspension of the mental health department's plan would be in effect until further notice, pending a reevaluation of the state's delivery of mental health services.

State Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh in February announced the plan to close four of the state's six mental health hospitals, lay off 948 mental health department employees and move about 470 patients to community-based care in expectation of steep budget cuts.

Under the plan, the existing Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa, an inpatient psychiatric facility for adults, would remain open until the replacement hospital was built. The new hospital then would be re-purposed to replace the Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility, a hospital for court-committed — or forensic — patients, in Tuscaloosa.

The plan would keep open the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center in Tuscaloosa, but mental health hospitals in Decatur, Montgomery and Mt. Vernon would close.

The plan also included offering the Taylor Hardin facility to the state corrections department for a possible prison.

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