

No firm closing date for Searcy Hospital

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MOUNT VERNON, Ala. (WALA) - There has been a lot of speculation that the Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon was about to close.

There have been reports that it was going to close at the end of this month, but FOX10 News has learned the closure date will not be that soon.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health will close Searcy Hospital. The decision is based in part on state budget cuts. At this time, a firm date has not been set, but state officials are in the process of relocating the 202 patients who stay there.

But the department spokesman said money is not the only reason why Searcy is closing.

1999 Supreme Court decision in Olmstead vs. L.C. said mental health patients have the right to live and be treated in their communities.

Jeff Shackelford with the Alabama Department of Mental Health said, "It went years without being enforced. Now the justice department is actually enforcing it."

Kenneth French has spent many years serving others with his car cleaning business down the road from the hospital.

"I don't think they should close that place, man. I don't want them to close it. They need to keep that place open," said French

Shackelford said many of the hospital's patients will be transferred to community-based programs, like Mobile's Alta Pointe facility.

Shackelford said, "There are certain patients that will always need a hospital, and those patients will continue to be at a hospital. However, there are more patients than not that don't necessarily need to be in a hospital, and they are more than capable of being treated in the community."

The spokesman said the Department of Mental Health will save \$32 million by closing Searcy, but \$16 million will be given right back to community-based programs.

And French will be sorry to see it go.

"My grandmama worked there 44 years," he said. "Searcy took care of me, my momma, my brother, my sisters. I don't think they should close it, man."

But just like he's hoping for his extra customers, he's hoping for the best for his city.

"God will make a way. God will make a way," French said.

The Department of Mental Health spokesman said there are nearly 300 employees at the hospital, and the department is helping them with job placement.

An announcement will be made when Searcy's closure date is finalized.

"When we do get everything ready, it will be a fairly quick turnaround," Shackelford said.