

PP receives approval to add abortion clinic

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Planned Parenthood of Rochester and the Genesee Valley has received regional approval to establish an abortion clinic at its 114 University Ave. headquarters.

But pro-life activists and some Monroe County legislators argue that the approval was granted too quickly and without a public hearing. They are considering ways to urge reversal of the approval decision — or at least force a public hearing — and are exploring the possibility of legal action before the clinic is approved by the state Department of Health.

Investigation by the *Catholic Courier* into the approval process also has revealed disparities between Planned Parenthood's intentions as stated by the agency's executive director and the information Planned Parenthood has submitted to state approval agencies.

The Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency (FLHSA) — which is empowered to conduct investigations and hearings on proposals for local health-care projects — granted administrative approval for the clinic March 11.

According to the Certificate of Need Proposal Planned Parenthood submitted in January, the clinic is to be located at the organization's headquarters. Renovation costs were estimated at approximately \$142,000, and Planned Parenthood stated in the proposal that it already has those funds.

Planned Parenthood projects that construction will be completed in January, 1993. In the proposal, the agency estimated the clinic would handle 600 abortions during its first year.

On Feb. 20, 1992, the state health department referred the proposal to FLHSA, which announced receipt of the application in its March newsletter.

The newsletter — mailed to regional health-care providers, social-service agencies and public officials — listed the proposal under the heading, "Applications Received But Not Yet Sched-

uled for Review." FLHSA's April newsletter announced that the agency had approved the clinic March 11.

FLHSA approved the application without a public hearing because it found the project had "no known significant community issues." Ed Lane, FLHSA's assistant director, said agency personnel were aware of opposition to the clinic — including civil disobedience at Planned Parenthood on Oct. 25, 1991, and the ongoing controversy over United Way funding for Planned Parenthood.

"It was because of those issues that we put it out in the March newsletter," Lane said. "But we received no inquiries as to the application."

He also noted that FLHSA did not approve the application for 21 days — a normal period for administrative approval of a project.

But County Legislator William Polito, a Republican representing the 8th District in Webster, claims he did not have enough time to respond. Polito said he was drafting a response when he learned that FLHSA already had approved the clinic.

"I feel that a public hearing should not have been bypassed," Polito told the *Catholic Courier*.

Polito and 11 other legislators have prepared a letter to William Gormley, deputy director of the state health department's Division of Health Facility Planning, requesting a public hearing and a reversal of the decision.

Vickie Zeldin, spokeswoman for the state Department of Health in Albany noted, however, that only FLHSA officials can decide at this point to conduct such a hearing.

Asked about the likelihood of such a move, Lane stated, "It's our position that we have processed the (proposal) and we would not bring it back for further review. It's our position that we are done with it."

But clinic opponents are not "done with it," observed David Dowd, a member of the Parish ProLife Network who has been investigating the issue.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Librarian Joanne Altland (right), and Virginia Segerson, a development administrative assistant at Planned Parenthood, review research materials April 16 in the library of the agency's University Avenue offices. The library, which is supported through Planned Parenthood's United Way allocation, served more than 1,500 people last year.

In addition to talking with county legislators, Dowd said the group is contacting state officials and is investigating the possibility of legal action to halt the clinic.

He claimed that state health-systems-agency law requires a hearing if affected individuals request one. That interpretation of the state law was shared by John Franzen, an attorney with the state health department.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Franzen cited 10 NYCRR H.S.A. 82-1.5 — part of the state law covering such health-systems agencies as FLHSA. Franzen said this provision requires an opportunity for a public meeting, especially for the consideration of "additional information provided by the affected party(ies)."

"Looking at that section," Franzen said, "you have a remedy, as I read it."

Although FLHSA will not revisit the current proposal, Lane said the application process could reopen if Planned Parenthood were to change its proposal.

That possibility arose during an April 15 *Catholic Courier* interview with Gregory Soehner, executive director of Planned Parenthood.

Asked about the clinic's site, Soehner said, "It hasn't been decided yet."

When asked why — given this lack of decision — Planned Parenthood had listed 114 University Ave. on the Certificate of Need application as the ad-

dress for the proposed clinic, Soehner replied: "The purpose of the CON is to add the service to our license and to establish the cost of the service. (That address) is a likely site."

Planned Parenthood's application also indicates that construction of the clinic would be paid for in cash, with \$142,184 listed as coming from "accumulated funds."

Asked if Planned Parenthood actually had that much cash on hand, Soehner answered, "I really can't say where the money is going to come from." He suggested that the agency might engage in some fundraising to pay for the project.

Told of Soehner's comments, Lane said the application designates 114 University Avenue as the clinic site and that Planned Parenthood has committed itself to paying for the project out of accumulated funds.

"If (Soehner) proposes to change (the clinic) from that location, then he would have to do further application processing," Lane said, adding that the state would question the application if funds are not actually on hand.

Polito said the county legislature might bring additional pressure to bear on the FLHSA. Noting that the state budget has eliminated funding for such local health-systems agencies, he said FLHSA will have to rely more on county funding in the future.

School parents petition bishop to cap tuition rates

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — More than 100 school parents and supporters have signed a petition asking Bishop Matthew H. Clark to "set a percentage cap which yearly tuition increases cannot exceed," and "to reconsider the entire issue of Quadrant schools."

The diocese received the petition — which was dated March 26 — in the mail on Monday, April 20, according to Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman. The petition was accompanied by letter signed by Karen S. Zilora.

In particular, the petitioners decried the recent tuition increase announced by the Southeast Quadrant, which set a rate of \$1,550 for a single child from a quadrant parish. The petitioners noted that in some schools, the new rate represents a 60 percent increase over current tuition levels.

"This level of increase, if justified, should be phased in, rather than subjecting parents to such an unconscionable increase at one time," the petition stated. The petition went on to point out that the current recession has left some parents jobless, and others without pay raises.

The petitioners asked the bishop to reconsider the entire concept of quadrant schooling. The petitioners blamed the quadrant's "additional level of bureaucracy" for creating high tuitions and losing students. The quadrant system also induces "apathy" among parents and parishes since it represents a "loss of local control," the petition concluded.

The petitioners also complained that the quadrant board "did not even have the tuition figures ready before the time when we had to register or re-register our children for next year."

Father Norton noted that officials in the diocesan Catholic School Office had received the petition only hours before the *Catholic Courier's* final deadline on Tuesday morning, April 21. He said that the office had not had adequate time to prepare a response to the petition, but that the diocese would reply to Zilora by the end of the week.

Quadrant officials announced the new tuition figures March 16. Registration has been taking place since the end of February and is still going on, according to Sister Patricia Carroll, SSJ, district superintendent for eastern Monroe County.

Sister Carroll noted that the quadrant's governance board had been

unable to calculate tuition rates before registration because the calculation requires a good estimate of the number of students who would be attending quadrant schools next year. Schools in the Southeast currently have a total registration rate of 95 percent, she said.

She noted that parents wishing to withdraw already registered students as a result of the tuition increase may obtain a \$50 registration refund.

Sister Carroll partially attributed the tuition increase to the September, 1993, deadline by which each quadrant is required to have reached a tuition level bringing tuition and school-based revenues up to 60 percent of the quadrant's overall costs. After September, 1993, parish-based funding will cover only 40 percent of quadrant costs.

Sister Carroll also noted that some quadrant schools charge families with two or more children in the school a tuition rate that is only nominally higher than the rate charged to families with only one child in school. She pointed out that this arrangement puts a greater financial burden on the parishes, which must pay a substantially higher per-pupil subsidy for such families than they would for families with only one child in a school.

In response to parental concerns

about the substantial tuition increase, Sister Carroll noted that Southeast pastors have set aside a total \$176,000 in financial aid for school parents. Meanwhile, the quadrant board has created a \$48,000 fund for tuition aid. In addition to these funds, quadrant parents can also apply through their schools for tuition assistance from the diocese, Sister Carroll commented.

A number of Southeast schools are attempting to create extra sources of funding in order to help parents pay the substantial increase.

Guardian Angels' principal, Catherine Kress, has asked her students to contribute \$1 each week from their own money. If every student participates in the effort, Kress estimated, she will collect \$2,000 by the end of the school year.

Sister Eileen Daly, SSJ, principal of Corpus Christi School at Blessed Sacrament in Rochester, said she worked diligently with parents prior to the tuition announcement, urging them to apply for financial aid.

Sister Daly added that her school is looking into establishing an "Adopt-A-Student" program that would match private donors with students in need of tuition assistance.