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## **Miami-Dade charter review task force votes to set permanent governance structure for Jackson Health System**

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A group tasked with proposing changes to the Miami-Dade County charter gave tentative approval late Wednesday to create a seven-member Public Health Trust to oversee the troubled Jackson Health System.

The change would enshrine the governance of the county's public hospital into the document that acts as Miami-Dade's constitution. The charter does not currently delve into such detail on Jackson oversight, which is largely regulated by a county commission ordinance.

Members of the charter review task force voted for the Jackson plan in their initial recommendations before a public hearing Wednesday night that was delayed by 75 minutes as group members rushed through votes on last-minute proposals. The task force had to put forth its proposals before allowing the public to comment on them.

The delay and flurry of late votes prompted confusion at the meeting, held at the county commission chambers. More than 50 people — including a couple dozen in matching green Jackson union T-shirts — shifted in their seats waiting for the hearing to begin.

Once it did, speakers voiced opinions ranging from concerns that the task force should not try to fix the cash-strapped public health system's woes through a charter change to gratitude over the group's intent to limit the county commissioners' power in creating new cities.

"We do feel it's very important that the process be allowed to proceed without interference by the [commissioners] drawing boundaries to suit their own political purposes," said Bev Gerald of the countywide Let's Incorporate Now Coalition.

Task force members amended on Wednesday their initial incorporation proposal, which would have left commissioners entirely out of cityhood decisions, to allow them to review incorporation petitions and make recommendations on issues such as boundaries.

The group, created by commissioners in March, has met for two months to draft its recommendations, which will not be finalized until Tuesday. Commissioners will take up the proposals next month to decide whether to place them before voters in the November general election, although they have agreed to place any amendments directly on the ballot if they are backed by two thirds of the task force.

The 20-member task force, hastily created after commissioners said they preferred a new review to adopting changes a similar group put forth in 2008, has rarely had enough members present at its meetings — 14 of 20 — to meet that two-thirds requirement. Wednesday's meeting comprised 16 members; 12 voted for the Jackson proposal and four voted against.

"All we're doing with this proposal is making sure that we at least have a firewall" between the health trust and commissioners, who have been accused of meddling in Jackson's affairs in the past, said state Sen. Rene Garcia, a Hialeah Republican and the task force's chairman.

Garcia authored the Jackson proposal, which would allow commissioners to appoint the inaugural trust but would then leave picking replacements to trust members. The trust's nominees would go to commissioners for approval.

Those who opposed the proposal said Jackson's governance structure would best be left to legislate by ordinance, which can be more easily amended as needed than the charter.

"I don't see what we've accomplished by transferring all these powers and making them permanent," task force member Terry Murphy said.

Martha Baker, head of the SEIU Local 1991, which represents Jackson's nurses and other healthcare professionals, questioned the need for the charter change.

"These things don't belong in a charter when we talk about fixing Jackson, especially in such a rushed manner," she said.

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