

## The fight's not over: A Call to Action from the Mental Health Movement

# WHY WE OCCUPIED RAHM EMANUEL'S OFFICE

Mayor Emanuel thought he could just roll over our city's 99%, especially its most vulnerable citizens, by passing a budget that closes half Chicago's mental health clinics, privatizes all of its neighborhood health centers and cuts off other services to its poorest citizens. He thought twisting arms to get a unanimous vote would keep people from noticing that he balanced the budget on the backs of the city's poorest communities. He thought people wouldn't notice he's cutting the jobs of hundreds of mostly black and Latino workers and slashing needed services in the most under-served communities while expanding benefits for rich corporations. He thought the story would be that he made tough but necessary choices.

But Mayor Emanuel's story was interrupted when, in the middle of a work day on the day before the budget passed, 200 people packed into the Chicago Temple and then headed over to city hall where an advanced group of 12 had begun a sit-in on the doormat to the Mayor's office, which we declared "Rahm's Psych Ward."



For ten hours we occupied the fifth floor. For ten hours every person who came and went heard the "people's microphone" telling the stories of those in the sit-in whose lives hang in the balance of this fight. We told our stories of suicide attempts, of families full of mental illness, of therapists saving lives, of struggling to find safe spaces and trust, of not being able to access care in the private sector, of being pushed around at the whims of private providers, of doors closing everywhere but at the public clinics.

Let us be clear. Private clinics will not and cannot provide the safety net of services that the most vulnerable citizens of Chicago need. It has taken us years to create the relationship we have with our therapists. Most people who are suffering with mental illness cannot just pick up and move to a private clinic. Do you remember what happened when our parking meters were privatized? Prices went up and quality went down. There was chaos. **The difference is that this time the chaos will cost lives and not just inconvenience drivers. We won't allow our clinics or any other services vital to the wellbeing of the 99% to be closed or privatized.**

Shuttering the doors of our clinics is just one example of how this budget cold-heartedly attacks those with the least for the benefit of those with the most. While Rahm closes our clinics, he rewards his crowd, the LaSalle street bankers and the Gold Coast elites, with tax cuts like the elimination of the "Head Tax" on big corporations. The Chicago Mercantile Exchange got \$15 million in TIF money - which is OUR tax dollars set aside to develop OUR communities. Under Rahm's leadership hundreds of millions in TIF monies will be left in slush funds to subsidize the rich. For those of us burdened with mental illness he promises us only the loss of our therapists and our only safe places - our clinics. He has shown clearly with his budget that under-served communities will continue to get the short end of the stick.

We will fight for an amendment to the budget to save our clinics. We will fight for money that is going for corporate welfare - such as TIF's - to be returned to the people. We will fight for our right to be heard in the decisions that affect our lives. We insist, NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US.

**This fight is the canary in the mine. If the people's voice is not heard in the first budget under this administration, it will be more difficult to make it heard in the future.** We will be canvassing neighborhoods, collecting signatures, meeting with Alderman and holding protests and direct actions. **Join us because we are you and you are us and the future of our city depends on our ability to unite and fight.**