

Volunteers of America of forcing its program on a low-income, minority neighborhood it thinks wouldn't resist.

"I represent 6,500 people in the South End of Albany, that's who I'm speaking on behalf of," McLaughlin said.

If Horizon Center loses the five-year, \$7 million contract, which expires Sept. 30, it will almost certainly close, said its executive director, Gus Ramirez.

Ramirez said Horizon Center, a local not-for-profit with a 25-year history, cannot compete with the national group in money and influence.

He said Horizon's best hope is that the city will reject Volunteers of America's application, leaving it with no building, even if it does win the contract.

"If the city doesn't make (that) decision, they will basically close our program down," he said. "If we lose that contract, we're out of business."

Ramirez said he believes money will drive the federal government's decision.

Joel Yager, Volunteers of America's director of advancement in its western New York chapter, said the Bureau of Prisons will decide based on the quality of the program and said VOA facilities have received high marks in Rochester and Binghamton and could help the South End.

"She shouldn't have said anything or done anything," he said.

It was not immediately clear late last week if any other organizations had submitted bids to the federal government to run the halfway house. Yevoli said Volunteers of America is the only group with an application currently before the city.

Approving the facility while the city is actively drawing up plans to revitalize the South End would send the wrong message, said Lucille M. McKnight, a county legislator who represents the neighborhood.

"It's like we're being targeted," McKnight said. "If the city has pointed these people to our neighborhood, then they're part of the problem."

"What they're asking for is the poorer neighborhoods to keep accepting all of these social facilities," she added, citing a parole housing facility on Ferry Street, the city's largest homeless shelter on South Pearl Street and an alcohol and drug treatment facility at Franklin and Bassett streets. "The only thing that's going to make this neighborhood come back and thrive is some good investment."

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