

## Group: Deaths show Tinley Park center should close

By ANDREA ZELINSKI | Associated Press Writer

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. - Advocates for disabled citizens worry that politics and union influence will derail plans to close a troubled suburban Chicago center for people with developmental disabilities.

Delivering petitions with 1,500 signatures Tuesday, they urged Gov. [Pat Quinn](#) to renew plans to shut down Howe Developmental Center, a facility repeatedly cited for negligent care.

"This is a facility that is broken. It's not going to be fixed," said Zena Naiditch, head of Equip for Equality.

The groups allege the center contributed to the deaths of 29 patients since 2005 -- five of them since September alone.

"Each of the deaths have these hallmark signs of very, very problematic care," said Deborah Kennedy of Equip for Equality, who oversaw investigations of each death at the center. "This is a long-standing sign of a facility that is unfixable."

The state Inspector General is still investigating four of the five recent deaths at the [Tinley Park](#) facility, according to [Tom Green](#), spokesman for the Department of Human Services. The office closed one case, saying there was no evidence of neglect.

The center, home to 295 people, lost its federal certifications in 2007 after being cited for poor record-keeping and patient care. That has cost the center \$40 million from the federal government and \$26 million in annual Medicaid matching funds.

State officials announced in September plans to close Howe by July 1, but a legislative committee put the closure on hold last month so Quinn could weigh in. The committee expects to make a final decision by April.

But a major union opposes closing Howe.

Shuttering the facility would put 750 staffers out of work, according to the [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#).

"Our union believes that individuals should have a choice of care settings and Howe should remain open," said Anders Lindall, a spokesman for the union.

He said the facility was mismanaged under former [Gov. Rod Blagojevich](#) and Quinn should take a hard look at the center and decide to keep it open. Lindall denied workers at Howe had anything to do with the five recent deaths.