



In wake of defendant's jailing, Mobile mental health provider says psychiatric facility secure



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[View full size](#) Tuerk Schlesinger ... says EastPointe Hospital is secure.

[MOBILE, Alabama](#) – The region’s largest mental health provider Tuesday pushed back against assertions that it is ill-equipped to handle patients deemed a danger to the community.

The comments by AlaPointe Health Systems CEO Tuerk Schlesinger came in response to a Mobile County prosecutor’s contention it would pose a threat to public safety to allow an attempted murder defendant to be evaluated outside of jail. Assistant District Attorney JoBeth Murphree [sought and received a high bail](#) for the defendant, Shirley Bowman.

Schlesinger said EastPointe Hospital, a private facility in Daphne, has a public side with top-notch security features.

“It is a secure facility,” he said. “We take people regularly from the jail. That’s not an issue.”

Murphree said Tuesday that she was unfamiliar with EastPointe’s security measures.

Schlesinger said misconceptions persist after the [closure of the Searcy Hospital](#) in Mount Vernon last year.

When the state facility closed, it about 220 patients, about half of whom were from Mobile, Baldwin and Washington counties.

Schlesinger said AltaPointe conducted a thorough evaluation and determined that a small number of patients would pose a danger even under a supervised regimen of medication within EastPointe. He said the company contracts with Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa for 27 beds; currently 22 or 23 of them are filled.

AltaPointe has a range of options that can accommodate everyone else, Schlesinger said, from the secure wing at EastPointe to folks who receive treatment on an outpatient basis. He said some of the community-based group homes are locked facilities, mainly for the protection of the patients, themselves.

Schlesinger said many mental health professionals believe the community-based model is an improvement over having a large state hospital.

“We have all of the things in the community that we had at Searcy,” he said. “We’re better able to take care of a person than when Searcy was open.”

Bowman’s son last week sought to have Mobile County Probate Judge Don Davis commit her to AltaPointe. But Mobile County District Judge Bob Sherling’s \$30,000 cash-only bail supersedes that petition.

The family has hired a new lawyer to pursue the case.

Authorities allege that Bowman, 53, pushed her daughter out of a car they were riding in on Aug. 1 and began [choking her granddaughter](#), who was 4 years old at the time. In his civil commitment petition, Bowman’s son described a series of psychiatric episodes stemming from a head injury.

As for Schlesinger, he said he views the misconception about AltaPointe as a chance to spread the word about the reorganization of mental health services in southwest Alabama since the closure of Searcy in October.

“Anytime someone brings it up is a great opportunity for us to teach the community how the system works today as opposed to the way it used to work,” he said.