

# Esperanza Center temporarily closed due to neighboring fire

Esperanza Center, a Catholic Charities outreach located on South Broadway in Fells Point, is temporarily closed due to a four-alarm fire Sept. 7 in the neighboring Budeke's Paints building. It will remain closed until repairs are made and the building is safe.

Staff members are currently exploring options to house services temporarily elsewhere. As of Sept. 14, Eric Seymour, director of client services at Esperanza Center, said there is no update on a temporary location for services, but the charity hopes to have an answer by Sept. 24.

Giuliana Valencia-Banks, who works in the center's immigration legal services department, recalled that as crews were still battling the blaze, clients were approaching the building seeking services. One, she said, was a mother carrying her young son who had injured his leg. The mother was surprised that the center was closed, and wondered where she would go for assistance.

"Our top priority remains serving our neighbors and people in need," said Bill McCarthy, executive director of Catholic Charities of Baltimore in a news release prepared by the organization. "We will not rest until we have those services restored."

Val Twanmoh, program director of Esperanza Center, said in the news release that removing damaged walls, carpet and furniture will take months. The staff will continue to search for alternative locations to house programs including language and citizenship classes, legal aid and medical and dental care.

"This fire has been devastating for our staff and clients, but we will overcome this challenge and continue to serve," Twanmoh said in the release.

Staff members of the center is working with media who broadcast in Spanish to reach clients, though the center's scope reaches beyond Spanish-speakers.