



CITY OF ATLANTA

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ANDRE DICKENS
MAYOR

September 9, 2022

Candice L. Saunders
President & CEO
Wellstar Health System

Dear President Saunders:

Thank you for making yourself and your team available to meet with me and my leadership team, per my request last week. While we appreciate your willingness to share information regarding Wellstar's decision to close Atlanta Medical Center, I continue to have serious concerns about how your decision will impact access to healthcare for residents and visitors of Atlanta, as well as those of surrounding communities.

I reiterate that Wellstar's decision to close Atlanta Medical Center will most adversely impact low-income populations in the metro Atlanta community—just as your closure of Wellstar Atlanta Medical Center South did.

At a time when we are confronting two simultaneous public health crises—COVID-19 and Monkeypox—and over a long weekend where Atlanta welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors to significant and complex events, our team has diverted our attention to your surprise announcement and has scrambled all available resources to understand and address this new crisis. We have cumulatively spent hundreds of hours engaging stakeholders—including members of the community and your own employees whose jobs are now in jeopardy—just to fully scope the potential aftershocks of your decision.

As Mayor of Atlanta, I will leave no stone unturned as I explore every option to safeguard access to vital healthcare services for members of our community.

But let me be clear: Wellstar still has a responsibility to this community as well. Wellstar needs to provide immediate answers to the community about what you are doing to mitigate the harm to the community of this closure. Specifically:

- a. Wellstar must detail its plans to transition care for current patients and those who are newly admitted between now and your planned closure date, to prevent any gaps in care.
- b. Wellstar must detail its plans to support your medical staff and students, including transition plans to other Wellstar facilities or other healthcare providers.
- c. Wellstar must immediately engage with other healthcare providers and emergency first responders in the metro area to develop a new plan to ensure that those patients requiring emergency care will be able to receive it.¹

During our meeting, I received your commitment that moving forward you will now engage the City of Atlanta as a primary partner as we work with all stakeholders to determine how best to meet these healthcare needs. I will hold you to that commitment.

The City of Atlanta also has a significant interest in the future of the 25-acre Atlanta Medical Center site in the heart of the historic Old Fourth Ward community. During this meeting, I also received your commitment that the City will be primary in all future conversations related to that site. With respect to that site:

- a. The City of Atlanta prioritizes continued use of the site—in whole or in part—for healthcare services, whether delivered by Wellstar or another provider. Following the closure of Wellstar Atlanta Medical Center South in East Point, you continued urgent care and other healthcare services at that site. That sets a minimum standard of what we expect in Atlanta.
- b. The Atlanta Medical Center currently houses the Atlanta Police Department's Zone 6 Crime Suppression Precinct. Wellstar must immediately engage with the Atlanta Police Department to secure the future of this critical link in our public safety system.

Separate from our conversations with Wellstar, my team and I have engaged other healthcare providers, Federal, State and County leaders, neighboring municipalities, and other stakeholders as we have studied the impact this closure will have on our communities and explored options to ensure continued access to high-quality and affordable healthcare for our residents.

¹ "He probably shouldn't be alive, but because of them he is. Unfortunately, that may not be the case for other people if this closes." *CBS 46: Family of surviving Midtown shooting victim reacts to Atlanta Medical Center closing* (Sept. 5, 2022).

We will continue to engage these partners to quickly identify potential resources and services to meet the needs of our community and mitigate any detrimental impacts from your decision to close Atlanta Medical Center.

We look forward to receiving further information per the questions above and scheduling a follow-up meeting within one week.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andre Dickens", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mayor Andre Dickens

CC: Atlanta City Council President Doug Shipman
Members of the Atlanta City Council
City of Atlanta Chief Operating Officer Lisa Gordon
City of Atlanta Chief of Staff Odie Donald II
Atlanta Fire Rescue Department Chief Rod Smith
Atlanta Police Department Interim Chief Darin Schierbaum