



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
CITY OF CHICAGO

May 22, 2023

Ms. Debra Savage  
Chairwoman  
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board  
525 W. Jefferson St., Second Floor  
Springfield, IL 62761

Re: University of Chicago Medicine - Cancer Facility Project Letter of Support

Dear Chairwoman Savage and Members of the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board:

As the Commissioner of Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), I write to you in support of the University of Chicago Medicine's (UCM) application for a proposed dedicated Cancer Facility as part of its Medical Center on Chicago's South Side. The proposed cancer facility will increase access to complex care for patients, offer convenient and compassionate care to neighborhoods where cancer is most prevalent and bring a world class cancer facility to the city of Chicago.

Under Healthy Chicago 2025 – CDPH's citywide, five-year community health improvement plan – CDPH supports our Chicago partners in work that reduces the racial life expectancy gap in Chicago. Chronic diseases, including cancer, are top drivers of that gap, so we are committed to advancing strategies to address this critical need. Residents on the South Side of Chicago are twice as likely to die from cancer compared to almost anywhere else in the United States and cancer is the second leading cause of death.

The UCM is deeply committed to addressing cancer health disparities impacting Chicagoans. In fact, UCM is the main provider of cancer care for local Black communities: 39% of new cancer patients at UCM are Black, and in 2022, 27% of UCM patients enrolled in clinical trials were Black. To ensure improved cancer care delivery from screening, diagnosis, and aftercare, the UCM is the only tertiary cancer care member of the Southside Healthcare Transformation Initiative, a collaborative of 13 healthcare organizations and hundreds of community members and grassroots organizations to transform the ecosystem of health and healthcare on the South Side of Chicago. The planned UCM Cancer Center - a 575,000 square-foot, freestanding facility—will further enhance your capacity to provide state-of-the-art care for residents of Chicago's South Side, including our most underserved communities.

We know that inequities in health outcomes related to cancer are largely a product of the social determinants of health, including access to cancer prevention and care. A new cancer facility will simply provide South Side residents with healthcare resources that other neighborhoods in the city often take for granted.

The UCM also has a longstanding commitment to education, outreach and research related to important cancer needs in the community. Through established partnerships with community organizations, faith-based organizations, and local healthcare systems, the center's Community Outreach and Engagement team focuses on culturally tailored education and critical linkages to care for screening and trials. In the policy arena, the UCM has helped to lead and advocate for key initiatives and legislation including bills to support cancer health equity, funding access for cancer prevention and control services, support for minoritized populations' participation in clinical trials through Medicaid funding, tobacco control, access to tumor biomarker testing for Medicaid enrollees, and telehealth support.

Finally, the UCM has demonstrated strong commitment to Chicago youth interested in careers in biomedicine. Since 2014, nearly 200 local high school and undergraduate students have participated in its cancer research pathway programs. The programs provide immersive research experience in state-of-the-art facilities, guided career development opportunities, and personalized mentorship networks. Thus, UCM pathway programs empower local youth to shape cancer science and care in ways more responsive to the needs of marginalized populations, with potentially profound implications for cancer health equity in our city and beyond.

Today, over half of South Side patients leave our area for the complex care they require. Research shows delayed care is directly correlated with worse health outcomes. Living farther from healthcare facilities creates longer lengths of hospital stay, non-attendance at follow-up visits, and increased overall disease burden. The proposed hospital will decrease the effects of delayed care for all South Side patients.

Building a world class cancer facility on the South Side will bring technologically advanced care incorporating the newest therapies and treatment innovations to a part of the city that has been historically underserved by the healthcare community. As one of only two NCI designated cancer facilities in the state of Illinois, a cancer facility constructed by UCM stands to reimagine cancer care for the South Side and the entire city of Chicago.

CDPH and UCM have remained partners in the fight against cancer inequities in Chicago. The development of a South Side UCM Cancer Center is timely in improving access to advanced cancer diagnostic and care therapies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Allison Arwady, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small "MD" at the end.

Allison Arwady, MD  
Commissioner