

Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 W. Jefferson Street
Springfield, IL 62761

Re: Support for Northwestern Medicine's Application for an Open-Heart Surgery Program at Lake Forest Hospital

Dear Members of the Health Facilities and Services Review Board,

On behalf of the Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center, I am writing to express strong support for Northwestern Medicine's application to establish an open-heart surgery program at Lake Forest Hospital (LFH). Ensuring timely, high-quality, and accessible healthcare is central to our mission, and the program would improve care in Lake County.

Northwestern Medicine has demonstrated both the need for and the readiness to deliver this level of care. In 2024, more than 92% of patients admitted to LFH lived within a 20-mile radius and nearly one-third lived in under-resourced ZIP codes. Patients rely on LFH for their care, yet many travel significant distances for advanced cardiac surgery. This is concerning given that heart disease is a leading cause of death in Lake County.

In 2023, 311 LFH patients were transferred to Northwestern Memorial Hospital or Northwestern Medicine McHenry Hospital for cardiac surgical procedures following catheterization at LFH. This number increased to 320 patients in 2024. Transfers create delays and contribute to health disparities especially for those with limited transportation options. Additionally, the 2023 suspension of Vista Health System's open heart surgery program created a gap. Treatment is farther for residents who had a local option.

Establishing an open-heart surgery program at LFH would address these gaps by:

- Reducing transport times and ensuring patients receive urgent care
- Improving continuity of care for individuals already receiving cardiology services
- Strengthening regional preparedness and capacity for cardiovascular emergencies
- Bringing specialized services closer to patients in under-resourced communities.

We urge the Board to approve Northwestern Medicine's application. This expansion will improve health outcomes, reduce barriers to care, and support the health and wellbeing of Lake County residents.

With gratitude,



Christopher Hoff, MPH
Executive Director
Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center