

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2022

Candice L. Saunders
President & CEO
Wellstar Health System

Dear President Saunders,

We write to express our deep concern at the announcement that Wellstar Health System will cease operations at Atlanta Medical Center (AMC) on November 1, 2022. This announcement is especially concerning given that another facility of yours, AMC South, recently closed its emergency department in April 2022. We urge you to reconsider the decision in order to preserve access to health care, particularly emergency care, for patients across metro-Atlanta. The lives of people in Clayton, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Henry, Newton, and Rockdale Counties, as well as other metro-Atlanta counties, depend on the continued operation of your facility.

As you are all too aware, the last few years have been extremely difficult for our nation's health care system. We understand that hospitals have been struggling financially to keep up with rising labor costs, increasing patient admissions, and declining health outcomes due to various factors exacerbated by the pandemic. We also understand that Georgia's refusal to close the Medicaid coverage gap has contributed to the urgency of these issues, forcing hospitals to front the cost of providing care for uninsured and underinsured individuals. We all know that doctors will provide care to individuals that need it, without regard for their ability to pay. We will continue to do our part as Georgia's federally-elected officials to close the coverage gap, but we must ask you to do what you can to keep AMC open.

According to Wellstar's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) of 2022, AMC and AMC South together made up the largest licensed-bed hospital in the state with 762 beds. The community residents that AMC and AMC South serve are those that consistently experience more barriers to quality health care. The 2022 CHNA found that the community cannot access appropriate levels of care for a variety of reasons, including insurance status and lack of available providers.¹

Additionally, AMC South's emergency department, according to your own assessment, was one of the busiest in the region before it closed in April 2022. AMC South was also the largest employer in East Point.² Wellstar's announcement about AMC South's closing last spring stated that in-patient services will be consolidated at AMC in downtown Atlanta.³ We are extremely concerned about where those patients will go to seek care, if both AMC and AMC South's emergency department shut their doors.

The consequences of closing AMC, an important hub for health care in downtown Atlanta, are colossal. Grady Memorial Hospital, which is few blocks from AMC and the only other Level 1 Trauma Center in the city, is already strained by the number of patient visits to its emergency

¹ <https://www.wellstar.org/community/community-health-needs-assessment>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.wellstar.org/articles/wellstar-health-system-introduces-new-healthcare-model-at-atlanta-medical-center>

department. The closure of AMC will force Grady to absorb those patients, when it is already operating over capacity. Emory Healthcare, which has a facility in midtown Atlanta, will also bear the burden of the closure.

We implore you to rethink this decision and reverse course. At minimum, you must delay this decision until there is a plan in place, in consultation with the City of Atlanta and neighboring hospitals, to absorb these patients. We also request an immediate briefing from Wellstar that details the company's decision making process and its plans for mitigating the consequences of any closure on the community, the local economy, and hospital workers. Communities need access to quality health care to survive, and we have no doubt that the closure of AMC will have direct consequences on the lives of people in Atlanta.

Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress