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May 13, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Request for Discussions on Direct Health Care Relationship with City of Jacksonville

Dear Secretary Burwell:

As you know from media coverage of the 2015 Florida state legislative session and your recent meeting with Governor Scott, our state faces a crisis in providing health care for all Floridians. If the Florida Legislature and Governor do not quickly reach a mutually agreeable resolution with the Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on Low Income Pool (LIP) funding, Florida's medical safety net system could collapse to the detriment of local communities.

Any such collapse would have a particularly devastating and immediate impact in Jacksonville. At our safety net hospital, UF Health Jacksonville ("UF Health") and its related clinical sites, physicians see more than 1.2 million outpatient visits and more than 34,000 inpatient admissions annually. UF Health employs more than 5,000 faculty and staff – making it the sixth largest employer in Northeast Florida and largest minority employer in Jacksonville – and produces an annual economic impact of nearly \$800 million. It is the region's sole Level 1 trauma unit and only academic medical center, with 350 University of Florida faculty physicians and 350 resident and fellowship physicians.

In November 2013, the University Healthsystem Consortium, the national alliance of 118 academic medical centers and 299 affiliated hospitals, gave UF Health high marks in overall quality and accountability based on criteria such as mortality, effectiveness, safety, equity, patient centeredness and efficiency. But UF Health is only able to provide this kind of service to its patients due to significant public investment. In recent years, this financial support has primarily come from LIP. Currently, UF Health receives nearly \$95 million annually in LIP hospital funding and \$25 million in LIP faculty funding.

The loss of LIP funds would be catastrophic for UF Health. With less than 60 days of operating cash, and a high percentage of Medicaid and non-paying patients, UF Health simply cannot survive without the current LIP funds or a comparable funding stream. Its closure would constitute a devastating and unprecedented public health emergency for the more than 1.3 million people living in Northeast Florida.

At present, UF Health receives approximately 90,000 emergency room visits each year, 4,000 of which are trauma. Our community does not have the medical infrastructure or capacity required to redistribute those visits to other health care facilities. Additionally, if UF Health were to close, the nearest Level 1 trauma center would be in Gainesville, nearly 75 miles away in North Central Florida. Our City Department of Fire and Rescue and other regional rescue units cannot transfer patients to Gainesville multiple times daily without seriously compromising their overall rescue responsibilities.

I support Medicaid expansion and applaud the Florida Senate's efforts to find innovative LIP and Medicaid solutions that can receive federal approval. But if both houses of the Florida Legislature and the Governor cannot find common ground with the Department of Health and Human Services and CMS, the massive repercussions will be felt most immediately and acutely in Jacksonville. As Mayor, I simply cannot allow that to happen without exploring all options to keep UF Health open.

Jacksonville and other communities with safety-net hospitals must not be held hostage by the actions or inactions of decision-makers in Tallahassee. In order to protect our patients, medical professionals, and local economy, I hereby request direct discussions with the Department of Health and Human Services to forestall any service impacts on UF Health Jacksonville in the event Florida's LIP and/or Medicaid issues are not soon resolved. If our state government cannot or will not act, the City of Jacksonville and other local governments should have the opportunity to bypass Tallahassee and work directly with the federal government to find innovative LIP and Medicaid solutions.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you in person or by telephone as quickly as possible to discuss how the Department of Health and Human Services and City of Jacksonville can work together to provide "access to high quality health care coverage for all" as stated in the May 6 press release following your meeting with Governor Scott.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. I look forward to our discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alvin Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alvin Brown
Mayor

Cc: The Honorable Bill Nelson, United States Senate
The Honorable Marco Rubio, United States Senate
The Honorable Corrine Brown, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Ander Crenshaw, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Mia Jones, City of Jacksonville Health Commissioner
Russell Armistead, Chief Executive Officer, UF Health Jacksonville