



Health Professionals
and Allied Employees
HPAE/AFT/AFL-CIO

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July 20, 2020

The Honorable Phil Murphy
NJ Governor
Office of Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

On behalf of the nearly 4,000 public sector members of HPAE Locals 5094 and 5058 employed by Rutgers University and University Hospital, I am writing to inform you of our concerns and opposition to the University's actions that will result in the merger of the RWJ Medical School located in New Brunswick and the New Jersey Medical School located in Newark into one single Medical School. Despite the significance of this merger there has been minimum transparency and no oversight required of this transaction, leaving the communities served by both Medical Schools without an ability to fully understand how the merger will impact education, training, services and jobs in those communities, nor the ability to provide input whether they support or oppose the proposed merger.

Although Rutgers University is a public institution funded by the State, this pending merger is not governed by any state laws and regulations. The merger of two public Medical Schools should only happen through legislative review and regulatory approval. Historically changes to the medical school structure, function, and location were only accomplished through legislation. However, Rutgers is bypassing the legislative process.

Another concern to our members, and one I strongly urge you to consider, is that the current proposal could contravene legally binding commitments in current state statute that are enshrined in the Newark Agreement's commitments to the community. As a result of the re-organization of Higher Education in 2012, the mission of Rutgers University included a commitment to maintain a thriving University Hospital/Rutgers Health campus, to ensure that the public health needs are met for the City of Newark and Greater Essex County.

Rutgers University's Chancellor Strom has taken steps to fast-track the consolidation of the medical schools without input from the public and with little consideration of the potential negative impact on University Hospital, our state's only public hospital that has provided essential critical care to the most vulnerable patients. Nor has the Chancellor sought input from Residents, Interns and Fellows on the Rutgers Health campus in Newark. The team of professionals

on that campus are a critical part of University Hospital and with a centralized system for allocating these positions there may be greater incentive to reallocate residents away from University Hospital and into more suburban hospitals to support physicians that generate higher revenues from a more lucrative payor mix.

We believe, these actions may be a violation of the Newark Agreements and we urge the Administration to investigate and hold public hearings to determine whether the consolidation will negatively impact the Rutgers Medical School, University Hospital and the Rutgers Health campus and whether the merger will violate the state's commitment to the Newark community.

HPAE opposes the medical school merger as we believe this is not in the best interest of the Newark community.

- We demand that any merger must maintain all prior commitments to the City of Newark, preserve current services and invest in future programs to enhance the quality healthcare services, medical education.
- We urge for the swift passage of legislation or regulations be put in place that will restrict Rutgers University from unilaterally moving or displacing residents, interns and fellows, clinical services, and faculty to other hospitals, regardless of the financial motivations for doing so.
- We urge you to demand that University Hospital be represented in the decision making process, allowing the Hospital to have a vote over any move that involves the workforce as bound by statute in order to protect the integrity of the Newark campus.

Protecting public health care must be a top priority for New Jersey, which has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

The medical school merger will likely hamper University Hospital, only to undue the success of your Administration which has taken great strides to reinvest in University Hospital. The Executive Order which resulted in the appointment of Judith Persichilli as the monitor of University Hospital set a course to rectify the previous administrations mismanagement. The current CEO, Dr. Elnahal has continued to move forward the agenda which Commissioner Persichilli began before joining your Administration.

New Jersey Medical School must continue to be a direct partner with University Hospital. Both clinical and financial commitments if severed or altered in any way could jeopardize University Hospital's ability to continue the revitalization plan to improve and expand healthcare services.

Simultaneously, changes are taking place within Rutgers Health as a direct result of the master affiliation agreement (MAA) between Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and RWJ-Barnabas Health. Key parts of the Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health and Rutgers University, 20-year, multi-billion-dollar



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affiliation still have not been made public even though Rutgers is a public institution, which receives taxpayer funding. Without transparency little is known as to how the MAA will impact the Medical Schools and University Hospital. Thus, the merger of the Medical Schools is being rushed through without the public having any understanding of how these mergers and affiliation efforts will have an impact on the overall public healthcare system which have all been tied together for decades.

Chancellor Strom recently stated his intent is to have all Rutgers physician faculty managed by the RWJ-Barnabas Medical group, and all faculty practices to be managed by RWJ-Barnabas Health.¹ University Hospital must be the primary academic medical center for Rutgers NJ Medical School as stated in the Newark Agreements and Rutgers must be held accountable to meeting this commitment.

HPAE, along with labor and community allies intend to work with your Administration to ensure that decisions regarding public higher education, medical schools, and University Hospital are not made behind closed doors with no input from all stakeholders. We will not stand by and allow a takeover facilitated by Rutgers University that violates the Newark Accords and place the needs of the community of Newark and the greater Essex County region at risk of losing resources and services that will only lead to greater healthcare disparities.

We urge you to intervene on behalf of HPAE members, labor and community allies to provide oversight and transparency of the Medical School mergers and the MAA. We urge you to conduct public hearings and through the legislature create a regulatory review process to ensure any decisions made are done so in a manner that protects and invest in public health care across the state, while adhering to the commitments made to protect and provide public healthcare services the community of Newark and the greater Essex County.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. If you wish to discuss this by phone, please contact me at your convenience (609) 828-4105.

Sincerely,

Debbie White, RN and President

¹ <https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/07/partnership-between-njs-state-university-system-large-private-health-network-almost-complete/>

cc: NJ Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli, RN, BSN, MA
NJ Interim Secretary of Higher Education Diana Gonzalez
NJ Senate President Steve Sweeney
NJ Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin
NJ Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg
Sen. Ronald Rice
Asm. Ralph Caputo
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Asw. Shanique Speight
Rutgers University President Jonathan Holloway
Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Chancellor Brian Strom
University Hospital President Shereef Elnahal, M.D.
Newark Council President Mildred Crump
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