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January 26, 2022

The Hon. Jill Dunlop
Minister of Colleges and Universities
438 University Avenue, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

RE: York University proposal for a new school of medicine in York Region

Dear Minister Dunlop,

The Regional Municipality of York is among the country's largest, fastest growing and most diverse communities. Along with our nine cities and towns, we are proud to work together with partners like York University to meet the changing needs of our thriving communities.

Together we strongly endorse York University's proposal for a new medical school in the City of Vaughan, and their vision for the future of medical education that closely aligns with York Region's vision of strong, caring, safe communities.

More than 1.2 million residents call York Region home, and that number is forecasted to grow to over 2 million by 2051. As one of the most diverse communities in Canada, more than 120 different languages are spoken in our communities and our residents come from over 230 distinct ethnic origins, with one in two identifying as a visible minority and nearly one in two born outside Canada.

While large and dynamic, our population is also aging. By 2031, one in five residents will be 65 or older. Compared to previous generations, they are healthier, living longer and continue to work past retirement, but there is also a growing number who tend to be more vulnerable and have more complex and costly needs. Overwhelmingly, our residents want to age safely in their communities and require access to community care that includes innovative models of service that support prevention and early intervention, reducing the need for more costlier health care.

Many residents of York Region, and in particular those in more rural areas, are not well serviced by the current number of doctors in our communities. In 2020, the number of active physicians in York Region was 1.7 per 1,000 residents. In comparison, this number is 2.2 across Ontario. With the Region having 8% of Ontario's population and only 6% of the total active physicians in the province, we anticipate access to primary care will worsen with our rapidly growing and aging population.

As our communities continue to grow and change, the complex human services needs of residents will also grow. We continue to see a growing number of people experiencing homelessness, increased opioid use, escalated mental well-being concerns and forecasted increase in reliance on social assistance.

Collaboration with community partners will be critical in developing and delivering services that meet the needs of all our residents at all ages and stages of life, now and into future. Upstream investments that ensure sufficient and appropriate primary care will reduce the need for costly acute care. Integrated, responsive and inclusive health and human services will be vital to a just and equitable post-pandemic recovery.

York University's interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning, wide breadth of academic programming and long-standing reputation for research excellence broadly align with the innovation we need to tackle the most pressing issues of our time. The addition of a new medical school in York Region is grounded in this framework of delivering curriculum with an understanding of the complexities of social and economic determinants of health, ability to leverage community assets to augment and reduce health care costs and produce community-minded doctors ready to engage and support our local realities. We welcome this critical addition to the social and health infrastructure York Region residents rely on.

From an economic development and human capital perspective, the school will add significant value to the regional ecosystem. It will be the place to develop the next generation of talent in the medical field, building much needed capacity to tackle future health challenges. This builds on York Region's history of working closely with York University to build strong relationships with the business community and enabling experiential learning opportunities for students.

With over 300 life sciences and health-tech companies, four world-class hospitals and several hospital-affiliated innovation programs already in York Region, the school of medicine will be the vehicle that enables researchers, students, entrepreneurs and business leaders to collaborate on innovative solutions. Having the medical school embedded in the Vaughan Healthcare Precinct, in close proximity to Canada's first "Smart Hospital" (Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital), will also provide an anchor for more life sciences-oriented businesses, further leveraging investments by the province in this hospital.

The school will leverage benefits from existing transit infrastructure to connect with the City of Vaughan and communities across York Region and the northern GTA, as well as the existing and planned subway connections. It will further leverage York Region's new precinct that brings health care, innovation and jobs to the lands surrounding the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital to bring positive change to the delivery of health care in our communities.

Region-based organizations and services could provide opportunities, including placements, internships and collaborative forums to support and enhance experiential learning, while at the same time helping orient future physicians to the social and economic realities of the residents and communities they serve.

The school can also count on our support to contribute to its success. Our Regional and Municipal governments deliver and collaborate on a range of integrated health and human services, including public health, seniors, housing and homelessness, social assistance, recreation and culture, as well as first responders, including paramedics, fire and police, and direct operations of two long term care homes. We are a participant on design of the planned Mental Health and Addictions Hub to be delivered by CMHA and a partner on all three Ontario Health Teams covering York Region, including Western York OHT. We will use these connections to support York University to deliver on its mission.

In closing, we reiterate our strong support for a new medical school in York Region. An investment in the school is a forward-looking investment in the health, well-being and success of more than 1.2 million residents who live, work and play in our dynamic, growing and diverse communities.

Sincerely,



Wayne Emmerson
York Region Chairman and CEO



Mayor Frank Scarpitti
City of Markham



Mayor Tom Mrakas
Town of Aurora



Mayor John Taylor
Town of Newmarket



Mayor Virginia Hackson
Town of East Gwillimbury



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