

Atlanta Alumnae Chapter

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

STATEMENT ON CLOSING ATLANTA MEDICAL CENTER

Wellstar's closing of the Atlanta Medical Center Hospital in downtown Atlanta is a devastating blow to metropolitan Atlanta. This stunning announcement, which seemingly surprised leaders in Atlanta, most of the metro cities, and Fulton County, merely highlights the dismal state of Georgia's healthcare in general.

While citing the void to lower-income citizens in Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward, the closure, just months after WellStar South Fulton's emergency room, significantly impacts all metro areas. It leaves only one Level 1 trauma center (Grady Health System) to service the over 5 million residents and 40 million annual visitors, making Atlanta the fourth most visited city in the nation. Comparable cities like Houston have six Level 1 trauma centers. The closure means, in the event of catastrophes such as traffic pileups on any of our six interstates, mass shootings, or other multiple injury occurrences, trauma victims must be transported to Macon or Augusta if Grady does not have enough beds. Hopes and prayers abound that no such incidents occur but given responses during other unforeseen events like weather storms, the gaps in Georgia's emergency preparedness remain unsettling.

Level 1 trauma centers are certified as providing comprehensive treatment to trauma patients from injury through rehabilitation; 24-hour in-hospital access to general surgeons; and availability of anesthesia, emergency medicine, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, radiology, plastic surgery, and treating a minimum number of trauma patients annually. Atlanta Medical Center has been an integral part of Atlanta's healthcare system since its original founding in 1901 as an infirmary by local Baptist pastor, Dr. Len Broughton. With support from the Georgia Baptist Association and later the sell to Tenet Healthcare, Tabernacle Infirmary, known for years as Georgia Baptist Hospital and later as Georgia Baptist Medical Center, has served the needs of members and neighbors for over a century.

Serving indigent needs is nothing new to these hospitals. In addition to the infirmary, the church assisted in establishing a home for helpless women and children, a girls' dormitory and school, and an employment bureau. Even the hospital administration acknowledges that "both hospitals serve a predominately low-income African-American population **that carry the burden of health disparities on almost every chronic disease** indicator that is a marker for being at higher risk relative to COVID-19, lower life expectancy and higher health care costs for treatment." Rather than abandon ship, leaving a significant number of its population in a "virtual health care desert" or making metro Atlanta's residents vulnerable to loss in the event of a mass incident, we ask the hospital administration, state and local government leaders, and the philanthropic community to take immediate steps to avert the closure of the Atlanta Medical Center.

We also call upon Governor Brian Kemp and our elected officials to immediately impanel a Commission to make recommendations to the Georgia General Assembly for acceptance of Federal Medicaid Expansion (already adopted by 38 states) to close the Medicaid funding gap which has contributed to WellStar's \$107 million losses and the shuttering of eight rural hospitals across the state in the last decade. While Georgia boasts a \$6 billion surplus in fiscal

2022, the acceptance of a closure of a major trauma center in Atlanta, with no plan to serve over 5 million residents is reprehensible and unacceptable. We implore our leaders, policymakers, and civic leaders to work collaboratively to prevent the exacerbation of healthcare disparities and the loss of more lives.

Approved by Chapter: October 15, 2022