

## **Reid Caldwell, Southeastern Health**

Good afternoon. I am Reid Caldwell, the government affairs and policy management officer at Southeastern Health. I am joined today by one of our physicians, Dr. Thomas Walden. We are pleased to be here to talk about our petition to request an adjusted need determination for a linear accelerator in Service Area 18, designated for Robeson County.

The Gibson Cancer Center—a part of Southeastern Health—has provided radiation therapy services to the Robeson community since 1995. The Proposed 2019 State Medical Facilities Plan identifies our one linear accelerator as the 3<sup>rd</sup> busiest in the state. Only two linear accelerators are currently operating at higher volumes and both reside in Mecklenburg County. Mecklenburg County currently has 10 linear accelerators in seven different facilities that are distributed in multiple locations across the county. All but two of Mecklenburg County's linear accelerators operate at less than the 6,750 ESTV threshold, providing available access for area residents. In contrast, Robeson County has only one linear accelerator, currently operating at a rate of 9,000 ESTVs per year, and the next closest alternative is over 30 miles away. This is significant for several reasons:

- First, without the approval of an adjusted need petition, Southeastern Health will be forced to attempt to support the growing ESTV volume with its capacity limited to one linear accelerator. At some point soon, capacity will be completely maximized, and patients will be forced to delay treatment, travel for treatment, or forego radiation therapy treatment altogether. In the meantime, the continued overuse of Southeastern Health's one accelerator will likely lead to catastrophic equipment failure, with an estimated six-month non-operational period for a replacement, or at the very least a significantly shortened useful life.
- Second, there is no sustainable, accessible alternative for our patients to seek radiation therapy treatment if the one linear accelerator we have is unavailable. This was demonstrated a few years ago when our facility experienced a catastrophic fire rendering our radiation therapy services non-operational for nine months from June of 2015 to March of 2016. Southeastern Health went above and beyond to ensure our patients were taken care of during this period of time. We transferred, and even transported, active patients to Scotland Memorial or Cape Fear Valley Health

System for treatment, and we continued to accept new patients and coordinate their care with outside facilities until our accelerator could be replaced. We even loaned our radiation oncologists to those facilities as they were not equipped with the staff to handle the influx of patients. While we were successful in helping patients understand their options given the situation, continuity of care was disrupted. Some patients had to redo testing prior to continuing their therapy treatments due to differences in linear accelerator machines between facilities, causing treatment delays up to two weeks. And, of course, they had to travel outside of our community on a daily basis to receive their treatment elsewhere.

- Third, Robeson County is a federally designated healthcare professional shortage area and is recognized as a medically underserved area by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The county is majority-minority. We are one of the most diverse counties in the state representing nearly 70% minority populations, with 41% being American Indian. This is significant because minority populations are more likely to be poor, medically underserved, and demonstrate a higher cancer burden when

compared to non-minority populations. Many of our residents lack the funds or adequate transportation to seek treatment outside of their home town. Our Community Health Needs Assessment identified transportation as one of the top reasons people do not or cannot seek medical care. Moreover, we ranked 99<sup>th</sup> in per capita income out of 100 counties in 2010 and last in both the 2017 health factors and 2017 health outcomes County Health Rankings. As a result, Robeson County residents are at increased risk for poor health outcomes. In fact, Robeson County ranks within the highest quantile of cancer death rates per 100,000 persons among North Carolina counties.

- Lastly, if Robeson County was its own single county service area—as are other similar counties like Randolph, Onslow, Johnston and Davidson—the county would have already generated a need for one additional linear accelerator under the standard methodology. Specifically, Robeson County satisfies Criterion 1 of the methodology as the county has greater than 120,000 persons per linear accelerator. It also satisfies Criterion 3 with the deficit of linear accelerators needed greater than or equal to 0.25; Robeson County's deficit is currently **0.30**.

Our community is unique—no other community in North Carolina has the socioeconomic burden we carry, coupled with the extremely high utilization of its lone linear accelerator. The unique circumstance in which we find ourselves is why we strongly believe that an adjusted need determination will provide great benefit to the residents of Robeson County. In particular, we will be able to meet the rising patient demand for radiation therapy services and afford those in need with the most safe and effective care.

I urge the State Health Coordinating Council to approve our petition.

Thank you.