

**Marquita Ingram
UNC Health Wayne
Service Area 23 Linear Accelerator Petition
Virtual Public Hearing
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Good afternoon. My name is Marquita Ingram, and I am the oncology nurse navigator at UNC Health Wayne. I am pleased to speak today about UNC Health Wayne's petition for a special need adjustment in the 2026 State Medical Facilities Plan for one additional linear accelerator in Service Area 23, which includes our home county of Wayne County, as well as Duplin and Lenoir counties. As outlined in our petition, we would prefer that this special need adjustment be specifically allocated to an acute care hospital in Wayne County, for a cancer provider that already provides care through multiple modalities, except a linear accelerator.

UNC Health Wayne filed a similar petition last year requesting a special need adjustment for the *2025 State Medical Facilities Plan*. While that petition was not approved, our commitment to improving access to radiation oncology services for the patients we serve remains unwavering. The conditions that prompted our original request persist unchanged, and our determination to find solutions for our patients has only strengthened our resolve to return with this petition for the *2026 SMFP*.

I have been a practicing oncology nurse for over twenty years, and have been proud to work alongside the providers, administration, and staff at UNC Health Wayne. I have seen, firsthand, the high quality of care that my colleagues at UNC Health Wayne have been able to provide, not only to the patients of Wayne County, but to patients of surrounding counties, as well. UNC Health Wayne currently has a broad and comprehensive suite of oncological services, including chemotherapy, immunotherapy, biotherapy, and oncological surgical services. Close to my heart in particular is what I do, serving as a "cancer navigator," someone specially trained in helping patients and their families understand and work through health care barriers that could potentially interrupt their cancer care journey. In this way, I believe our care is particularly stellar, and I believe that everyone providing cancer care at UNC Health Wayne strives to deliver the utmost quality care to our patients.

However, despite the high quality of care that we provide, UNC Health Wayne does not currently operate its own linear accelerator. Among acute care hospitals in North Carolina, this is a rarity: as outlined in our petition, UNC Health Wayne is the ONLY acute care hospital in the state with more than 200 acute care beds that does not own and operate its own linear accelerator or that has not been approved to develop one.

Furthermore, there are four hospitals in North Carolina that offer LINAC services that have 100 or fewer acute care beds.

This remains a challenging situation for both our patients and providers. Because UNC Health Wayne does not have its own linear accelerator, our team must continue to refer patients to outside radiation therapy providers when linear accelerator services are required. Starting with the processing of the referral, to the scheduling of the referral, to the eventual delivery of radiation therapy treatment, there continues to be a significant lag time in the provision of the radiation treatment – sometimes as long as two months. For patients battling cancer, this adds a significant amount of stress and anxiety that our patients and their families do not need during this already-challenging time. More practically, this lag time can mean that a patient's cancer may continue to progress, sometimes leading to more complex treatment needs and diminished outcomes. This is time that our patients do not have, and time that could be lessened by UNC Health Wayne operating its own linear accelerator service.

Beyond the treatment delays, the current arrangement prevents UNC Health Wayne from providing a complete continuum of cancer treatment care and ensuring patient safety. This is particularly

problematic when it becomes necessary to transport fragile or medically unstable patients to Radiation Therapy Management Services in Goldsboro for treatments they could safely receive on-site if we had our own linear accelerator. In fact, there have been situations where EMS has declined the transport due to the overall condition of the patient.

I continue to see and work through many of these challenging cases first-hand. One such example is that of a young woman with metastatic cancer to the spine. Due to the severe backlog of patients waiting for radiation treatment she had to endure weeks of pain and suffering and lived in constant pain that required intensive help from family and friends to perform even the most basic activities of daily living.

Another example of a patient who faced increased barriers and challenges resulting from delayed access to linear accelerator treatment is that of a recent lung cancer patient who had a large tumor in the center of her chest. Due to the long wait times for initiating radiation therapy to shrink the tumor as well as having to seek alternative funding resources this patient had to live with the tumor for 4 to 6 weeks. During this wait time she suffered immensely from extreme shortness of breath which drastically limited her ability to function and required her to seek help from others.

As detailed in our petition, while UNC Health Wayne does not meet all the criteria that would trigger a standard need determination for a linear accelerator under the *State Medical Facilities Plan* methodology, we are very close to meeting Criteria 1 and 3. Unfortunately, due to geographic and demographic factors beyond the control of any providers in our service area, including UNC Health Wayne, we are not able to satisfy the standard need methodology requirements. However, the creation of a special need adjustment for one linear accelerator in our service area would recognize the unique circumstances we face and enable UNC Health Wayne to provide more coordinated, accessible cancer care.

In conclusion, we have chosen to submit this special need adjustment once again in consideration of our patients, the patients of Wayne County, and the patients of linear accelerator Service Area 23. Our commitment to improving access to necessary radiation oncology services has not wavered since our previous petition. The fundamental conditions that necessitate better coordination of care and improved access to linear accelerator treatment in Wayne County remain the same. A special need adjustment for one linear accelerator in our service area would ensure that my colleagues at UNC Health Wayne can apply for a CON to give our patients the best, most accessible, and most

convenient cancer care possible, and, hopefully, make their cancer journey as easy as it can be.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. I am joined here today by Howard Whitfield, UNC Health Wayne's Chief Operating Officer, and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.