Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2023

Douglas R. Lowy, M.D.
Acting Director, National Cancer Institute
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Lowy:

We write in strong support of the University of Rochester's Wilmot Cancer Institute's A1 revised application for a National Cancer Institute (NCI) Cancer Center Support Grant. Wilmot has established itself as the leader in cancer care and research in our region and is poised to join other NCI designated centers.

Last year, we were disappointed to learn that, despite presenting a strong application, the significant needs in our districts, and receiving an excellent score that was better than several of the most recent new Cancer Center Support Grants approved in other states, Wilmot did not receive a Cancer Center Support Grant (CCSG). However, the University of Rochester remains steadfastly committed to the goal of NCI designation, and over the past two years, Wilmot has worked to address the feedback received from the NCI review committee and strengthen their application. The University has articulated this commitment in its strategic plan, including a financial pledge of over $100 million to Wilmot, and plans to expand the cancer research footprint with additional physical space over the next five years. With NCI designation and the University's significant commitment, Wilmot will continue to push the frontiers of cancer science, enhance community engagement, and expand collaborations, including with Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, the nearest NCI center and a frequent research partner.

The Wilmot Cancer Institute is New York's largest cancer provider outside of New York City, providing care for a catchment area that includes 27 counties with a population of more than 3.2 million people. As Upstate New York's largest cancer center, Wilmot's 159 oncology physicians and 336 nurses treated over 5,500 cancer cases across 14 regional locations in 2021. Over its nearly 50-year history, Wilmot's research has led to significant advances in oncology standards of care and has helped lead the way in two of the top five cancer discoveries of the past half century as identified by the American Society of Clinical Oncology: utilizing virus-like particles to create the first approved HPV vaccine and carrying out clinical trials to demonstrate the effectiveness of anti-emetic therapy in patients undergoing chemotherapy. With over $30 million in annual sponsored research funding – including over $14 million in annual direct funding from NCI – Wilmot is leveraging its longstanding strengths within a framework of collaboration through three multidisciplinary programs that study cancer biology, the tumor environment, and cancer prevention and toxicity management.

Data shows that cancer incidence and mortality is significantly higher in the region that Wilmot Cancer Institute serves, as compared to the rest of New York State and the nation. This catchment area is the equivalent to the size of the States of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined and,

if considered as a state, would have the second highest cancer incidence in the nation behind only the State of Kentucky. Approximately one-third of people in this catchment area live in rural communities that are underserved, understudied, and negatively impacted by social factors. Of the 27 counties in this area, 26 have a higher poverty level than the U.S. average, including the City of Rochester, which ranks third in overall poverty among the nation's 75 largest metropolitan areas, and 12 of the 14 counties that are part of Appalachian portion of New York State. Furthermore, there are drastic and unacceptable cancer disparities by geography, race, and ethnicity among this population. Among other indices of disparity, individuals in Wilmot's catchment area experience longer delays between diagnosis and the onset of treatment, and higher rates of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.

While New York has seven other NCI-designated centers, we want to stress that the *catchment area Wilmot will support is not covered by another existing center* representing a large geographic portion of New York State, and has the support of Roswell Park, the closest and only other NCI center in upstate New York. As such, Wilmot has strong bipartisan support from not only the Congressional delegation, but Governor Hochul and the NYS Legislature. Given the size of this region and scope and severity of disease, investment in Wilmot's research infrastructure by the NCI through a Cancer Center Support Grant would allow Wilmot to expand its efforts to reduce the significant burden of cancer on our constituents by guiding efforts and attention where the need is greatest, collaborating with underserved communities to better understand and resolve cancer disparities, providing greater access to clinical trials and innovative treatments, and in turn, offering valuable data to NIH on a unique and currently uncaptured population that would have broader benefits to cancer care and research. Furthermore, an NCI Center would not only have an enhanced public health benefit, but based on an estimate from the Center for Governmental Research, it would also have a significant economic impact to the region adding nearly 1,900 new jobs, creating $194 million in labor income, and generating $15 million in income and sales tax annually.

Many of us have met individually with the Wilmot team from the University of Rochester to discuss Wilmot's application, and understand securing this designation remains not only a top University priority, but also continues to garner significant community commitment. It is clear from our discussions that following years of preparation and investment, and consideration of the feedback received from NCI last year, Wilmot is even more equipped with the resources to meet and maintain the rigorous standards for research, education, and cancer prevention and patient care required for NCI designation, and is prepared to capitalize on future opportunities for continued growth. As members of Congress representing upstate New York we are eager for our constituents to realize the benefits of representation by an NCI Center through access to improved research efforts, enhanced prevention programs, and the highest quality subspecialty multidisciplinary cancer care for patients and their families.

Again, we wish to convey our strongest support for an NCI A1 Cancer Center Support Grant for the University of Rochester's Wilmot Cancer Institute. Thank you for your full consideration of their application. Please feel free to contact any of us with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress

Claudia Tenney
Member of Congress

Nicholas A. Langworthy
Member of Congress

Marcus J. Molinaro
Member of Congress