February 3, 2012

The Honorable Sandra B. Cunningham
Chairwoman
New Jersey Senate Higher Education Committee

Dear Senator Cunningham,

On behalf of the Faculty Council of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, we are pleased to have the opportunity to address comments to the Senate Higher Education Committee regarding the Final Report of the UMDNJ Advisory Committee. The RWJMS Faculty Council is elected by and from the Medical School Faculty and recognized by the Medical School Bylaws as having the responsibility to "transmit the views of the Faculty" and review "policies that affect the academic mission of the school." As such, we are pleased to endorse publicly the recommendation of the Advisory Committee to merge Robert Wood Johnson Medical School with Rutgers University.

For nearly a decade, the faculty and staff of RWJMS have stood by as the fate of the Medical School and its relationship to Rutgers University has been examined, considered, and debated without action. During this period of uncertainty, opportunities for recruitment and growth have been lost, while the departure of many of our most productive colleagues to more certain futures elsewhere has hurt morale. The Faculty recognizes the complexities involved in realignment; nevertheless, we concur with the Advisory Committee statement on page 10 of the Final Report:

"At stake are...the lives and futures of the faculty, staff and students that bring these institutions to life, and, ultimately, the patients whom medical and health sciences education serves. For all these reasons, uncertainty must finally be put to rest. The time for action is now."

The existing strengths of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Rutgers University, coupled with our close proximity in Piscataway and New Brunswick, offer abundant opportunities to collaboratively work toward enhancing the reputations and impact of both institutions in each of our mission areas; namely, 1) the education of health professionals, 2) the conduct of biomedical, clinical, and public health research, 3) the delivery of health care, and 4) the promotion of community health for the residents of the state. In an addendum to this communication, we highlight such opportunities identified by the Faculty.

The Faculty of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School looks forward to the implementation of the integration of RWJMS with Rutgers University. We urge the State of New Jersey to act on this recommendation of the Advisory Committee in a timely manner, and with appropriate regard to the financial requirements and respect for faculty tenure and terms of employment necessary to make the merger a successful one. Thank you for the opportunity to communicate our views to the Senate Higher Education Committee.

Sincerely yours,

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Addendum

Since the January 2011 release of the report from the Task Force on Higher Education (the Kean Commission), the faculty of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School has engaged in thoughtful discussion of the recommended merger of RWJMS with Rutgers University. Here, we summarize observations that have emerged from these discussions:

• A merger of RWJMS with Rutgers would eliminate administrative barriers that complicate existing collaborations and hamper the development of new ones between scientists at RWJMS and Rutgers, thereby enhancing collaborative research efforts that would benefit from the close proximity of RWJMS and the life sciences infrastructure at Rutgers

• A merger of RWJMS with Rutgers would facilitate the development of new programs to train clinical residents and fellows in basic sciences related to their specialties, sciences that have a strong research base at Rutgers, including neurosciences, infectious disease, obesity, cancer and pharmacogenomics

• Graduate programs in the Molecular Biosciences, Neurosciences, Biomedical Engineering, Toxicology, and Exposure Science and Assessment, are currently offered jointly by the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at RWJMS and Rutgers. A merger of RWJMS with Rutgers
  - would serve to eliminate administrative disparities faced by students who are in the same graduate program and receive degrees granted jointly by two institutions, but are assigned to one university or the other by virtue of the affiliation of their research advisor
  - could offer GSBS at RWJMS students the opportunity to gain valuable teaching experience as teaching assistants for undergraduate courses

• Merger with Rutgers University, a nationally recognized, comprehensive educational institution would enhance medical residency recruitment efforts and offer opportunities for
  - expanded faculty development programs, research in education, and development of medical education courses (e.g. in collaboration with the Graduate School of Education)
  - MBA programs for interested residents in collaboration with the Business School
  - alignment of educational efforts with the School of Pharmacy

• Merger of RWJMS with Rutgers would allow the opportunity to create new translational programs where clinical fellows and junior faculty train in public health and government policies in premiere programs such as the Rutgers University Health, Health Policy and Aging Research Institute

• A successful merger of Rutgers with RWJMS would enhance career development opportunities for students and post-doctoral fellows by promoting access to career development programs at each institution, for example the RWJMS Post-doctoral Association and the Career Development office at Rutgers

• Merger of RWJMS with Rutgers should increase opportunities to forge new partnerships with area hospitals, expand subspecialty services, and establish locally deliverable tertiary services to improve patient care to the citizens of New Jersey
• Existing interactions between the Medical School and Rutgers that promote delivery of healthcare to the community, particularly the underserved, would be enhanced by operating within the administrative structure of a single University.

• Incorporation of a research-oriented Medical School into a major research-oriented state university offers the opportunity to cultivate cutting-edge research and create opportunity for new growth. A successful merger would include development of a sustainable financial plan, hiring of new faculty who can compete in an extremely competitive funding environment, identification of permanent leadership for departments and institutes, and recognition that scholarship and research efforts of Medical School faculty bring intrinsic value to the academic enterprise in addition to the possibilities they elicit for economic development.