UPEIFA
UNIVERSITY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
FACULTY ASSOCIATION

January 15, 2024

Ms. Shannon MacDonald
Chair, UPEI Board of Governors

Dear Ms. MacDonald,

We write today to raise concerns and request clarification on the status of the UPEI Faculty of Medicine.

On September 26, UPEI Administration notified the Board that the Spindle report analyzing the feasibility of integrating the new Faculty of Medicine into our already strained provincial health care system would be completed late in the fall. Despite the fact that UPEI Administration appears to have had at least a draft report prior to the Board's meeting on November 28, the information contained in the report was not discussed in that meeting. It is also important to note that while the UPEI Faculty Association requested that UPEI make this report publicly available under the *PEI Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, it was Health PEI rather than UPEI that ultimately released it. In fact, UPEI failed to even acknowledge the request until well after the legislated deadline. In our view, this is hardly congruent with UPEI's repeated public assertions that it is committed to greater transparency and accountability as core values.

The Spindle report makes it clear that there are many obstacles to establishing a medical school at UPEI. Moreover, since the inception of the Faculty of Medicine, key stakeholders from the PEI medical community have raised significant concerns around the feasibility of this project and its potential effect on health care access. This in addition to concerns raised by UPEIFA members and others, regarding funding for both the building and operations in light of UPEI's current debt levels, and the challenges UPEI employees and students are currently facing due to chronic under-resourcing. In a context where UPEI is struggling to deliver already-existing programs, and where a meaningful response to the recent Rubin Thomlinson report has yet to be costed and implemented, we have serious questions about the ability of UPEI to withstand the pressures of a project of such magnitude.

We are therefore deeply concerned that despite significant long-term concerns around the feasibility of this project, the UPEI Board of Governors in a recent meeting (November 28) approved a motion to further support this project financially without asking UPEI Administration for an update on the Spindle report, requesting information regarding potential obstacles to accreditation of the proposed program, or otherwise providing the sort of oversight for which it has sole responsibility under the *PEI University Act*.

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In the wake of Health PEI's release of the Spindle report, we are also troubled by public comments from UPEI that suggest that, two years and tens of millions of dollars into the project, it does not appear that UPEI has a clear picture of what it will cost, how the curriculum can be delivered, and whether students will even be able to train on PEI, something that UPEI Administration highlighted as a central reason for establishing the UPEI Faculty Medicine in the first place. In fact, the Spindle report suggests that, even without the current challenges faced by our health system, PEI may not ever have the capacity to adequately train doctors in-province due to our small size. Although UPEI has stated that students will likely have to do some training elsewhere, it has not provided clarification on where students can realistically be sent for that training. To propose to take students into a program without having a clear understanding of how the program will proceed and of where and how the training can be done is deeply concerning. The fact that UPEI is only now doing the due diligence that should have been done long before the Faculty was ever announced also deserves further scrutiny.

If the UPEI Board of Governors is sincerely committed to regaining the trust of the community, we believe it must address these issues publicly and in full transparency.

Going forward, we believe it is vital that the UPEI Board of Governors:

- direct and hold UPEI Administration responsible to provide all Board members with all available UPEI Faculty of Medicine information (ex. preliminary/final reports, progress reports, updates on accreditation, etc) prior to Board meetings;

- commit to making as much of the above information public as legally possible, on an ongoing basis;

- provide the public with robust evidence for its ongoing assessment of the prospects on this ambitious project;

- provide the UPEI campus community with robust financial information showing funding arrangements for the Faculty of Medicine, including current and projected spending beyond capital costs, and evidence-based assurances that the rest of the University will not be impacted by the ongoing costs of the Faculty;

- provide the UPEI campus community with robust financial information showing UPEI's current debt-levels including all lines of credit as well as loans and other forms of debt, and providing a clear plan for managing, servicing, and paying down this debt;

- provide the UPEI campus community with any and all previous due diligence performed by UPEI, including preliminary assessments, if any, made ahead of the official announcement in October 2021.

To be clear, the future of UPEI as a whole - and in no small part the future of health care on our Island - depends on the willingness of the UPEI Board of Governors to ask difficult questions and to reject answers

that are not supported by robust evidence. If you care as we do both about the ongoing viability of the only Island university and Islander's access to quality health care, we encourage you to carry out your legislated role with due diligence and in full recognition of the impact of your decisions on the entire Island community.

Finally, we respectfully request that you share this letter with all members of the UPEI Board of Governors.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Arfken
President
UPEI Faculty Association

cc: Members, UPEI Board of Governors