

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 19, 2024

Tim Wentworth
CEO, Walgreens
108 Wilmot Rd, MS #2002
Deerfield, IL 60015

Dear Mr. Wentworth:

With little notice and no input from community members, Walgreens recently announced that the 416 Warren Street location in Roxbury, Massachusetts will be closing this month.¹ This closure represents the latest in a series of Walgreens closures in predominately Black and Latino neighborhoods in Massachusetts, including Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park, since 2022.² Despite the cumulative impact of the closures in this area, Walgreens provided little notice to community members of the Warren Street closure, many of whom learned of the store's demise as its shelves were being cleared.³ Closing yet another Walgreens will make it harder for people in these communities to get essential medications, household goods, and groceries. We strongly urge Walgreens to keep the 416 Warren Street location open.

Many community members rely on the 416 Warren Street Walgreens to pick up their prescriptions or purchase essential products such as over-the-counter medications, first aid materials, diapers and baby formula, personal care products, and groceries.⁴ In announcing this latest closure, Walgreens advised that it would transfer patient files to a location approximately one mile away,⁵ just as it did when it closed the three locations in Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park in 2022.⁶ But these closures are occurring within the larger legacy of historic racial and economic discrimination that has created significant pharmacy and food deserts and lack of access to transportation in these neighborhoods.⁷ A large number of Roxbury residents rely on public transportation,⁸ and transit-reliant communities face substantially longer travel

¹ Shaun Chaiyabhat, *Boston residents protest planned closure of Walgreens pharmacy*, WCVB (Jan. 9, 2024), <https://www.wcvb.com/article/boston-massachusetts-protest-planned-closure-walgreens-pharmacy/46332199#>.

² Dana Gerber, *'We're getting cheated out of something': Three Boston neighborhoods are about to lose a pharmacy*, Boston Globe (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/11/07/business/were-getting-cheated-out-something-three-boston-neighborhoods-are-about-lose-pharmacy/>.

³ Tiffany Chan, *'We think it's insensitive': Residents outraged as Walgreens closes pharmacy in Roxbury*, CBS News Boston (Jan. 11, 2024), <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/walgreens-closes-pharmacy-roxbury-black-neighborhood/>.

⁴ *3 Walgreens in Boston Set to Close, Creating 'Pharmacy Deserts' for Some*, NBC Boston (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/3-walgreens-in-boston-set-to-close-creating-pharmacy-deserts-for-some/2886319/>.

⁵ Katie Brace, *Boston residents concerned of 'pharmacy desert' as closure of another Walgreens nears*, Boston 25 News (Jan. 11, 2024), <https://www.boston25news.com/news/local/boston-residents-concerned-pharmacy-desert-closure-another-walgreens-nears/3GZVCTAVOBHP3J7BNSMALHRPE4/#:~:text=The%20Walgreens%20at%20416%20Warren,on%20Washington%20Street%20in%20Roxbury.>

⁶ Dana Gerber, *'We're getting cheated out of something': Three Boston neighborhoods are about to lose a pharmacy*, Boston Globe (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/11/07/business/were-getting-cheated-out-something-three-boston-neighborhoods-are-about-lose-pharmacy/>.

⁷ Tiana Woodard, *Fourth Walgreens to close in a predominantly Black and Latino Boston neighborhood in about a year, raising equity concerns*, Boston Globe (Jan. 10, 2024), https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/01/10/metro/boston-walgreens-closing-on-mlk-day/?p1=BGSearch_Overlay_Results; Nurayn Khan, *Food Apartheid: Bridging Disparities in Boston*, Harvard Political Review (Feb. 14, 2023), <https://harvardpolitics.com/food-apartheid-boston-2/>.

times to pharmacies and grocery stores.⁹ More than 20 percent of Roxbury residents are food insecure, and parts of the neighborhood are more than half a mile from a grocery store.¹⁰ Boston hosts some of the greatest disparities in the country in access to pharmacies between predominately Black and Latino neighborhoods compared to predominately white neighborhoods.¹¹ Roxbury also faces the highest rates in Boston of chronic disease such as asthma and diabetes, alongside persistent barriers in access to health care.¹² The closure notification provides little notice to community members, including seniors, to find alternatives for getting their medications and essential products. For residents who don't have access to reliable transportation, seniors, and people with mobility limitations, an additional mile to access life-saving medication such as inhalers or insulin could be insurmountable, even deadly.¹³

Unfortunately, the closure of a Walgreens in a predominately Black and Latino neighborhood, without community input, appears to be a part of a larger pattern. Across the country, the concentration of pharmacies, including Walgreens, is shifting from Black and Latino neighborhoods to mostly white, higher income areas.¹⁴ In Chicago, Walgreens has shuttered locations in Black, Latino and low-income neighborhoods.¹⁵ The same pattern has occurred in Oakland¹⁶ and Milwaukee.¹⁷ Of the Walgreens locations that have closed in Boston, the closures have occurred exclusively in predominately Black and Latino neighborhoods. This is a deeply alarming trend that contradicts Walgreens' recent statement that it is "focused on driving equitable access to health and wellness services."¹⁸

Walgreens claims that it is seeking to expand its efforts to provide health care.¹⁹ The choice to close several Walgreens locations in neighborhoods that serve Black, Brown, and low-income communities in Massachusetts, and across the United States — without giving communities adequate notice and opportunity or alternatives to access — belies that goal and its stated commitment to serve the health of people across America. In an effort to preserve and protect the health of the communities that you currently serve, we strongly urge you to keep the Walgreens at 416 Warren Street open and to provide opportunity for meaningful community engagement and input on its future.

⁸ Boston Today (Mar. 2017), https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/document_files/2017/03/go_boston_2030_-_3_boston_today_spreads.pdf.

⁹ The Boston Story, TransitCenter (last visited Jan. 12, 2024), <https://dashboard.transitcenter.org/story/boston>.

¹⁰ Mayor's Food Access Agenda, Mayor's Office of Food Access (Apr. 27, 2021), <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2021/04/Mayor%27s%20Food%20Access%20Agenda%202021-2023.pdf>.

¹¹ HPC DataPoints, Issue 25, Mass. Health Policy Commission (Nov. 15, 2023), <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/hpc-datapoints-issue-25#pharmacies-as-a-setting-of-covid-19-vaccine-administration->.

¹² Health of Boston 2023, Boston Public Health Commission (May 12, 2023), <https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/boston-public-health-commission/health-data>.

¹³ Ronald Mitchell, *Keep Walgreens Open*, Bay State Banner (Jan. 10, 2024), <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2024/01/10/keep-walgreens-open/>.

¹⁴ Aaron Gregg & Jaelyn Pesier, *Drugstore closures are leaving millions without easy access to a pharmacy*, Wash. Post (Oct. 22, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/10/22/drugstore-close-pharmacy-deserts/>.

¹⁵ Esther Yoon-Ji Kang & Cheyanne M. Daniels, *You've heard of food deserts. Pharmacy deserts are just as bad*, Chicago Sun Times (Aug. 9, 2022), <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/8/8/23288677/pharmacy-access-south-west-sides-contraception-black-brown-residents>.

¹⁶ Brian Krans, *East Oakland residents oppose Walgreens' decision to close store*, The Oaklandside (July 22, 2021), <https://oaklandside.org/2021/07/22/deep-east-oakland-residents-walgreens-pharmacy-closure/>.

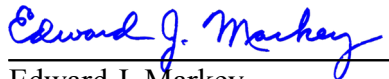
¹⁷ Ben Jordan, *Milwaukee among 8 cities with the worst pharmacy desert disparities, study shows*, TMJ4 (Dec. 19, 2023), <https://www.tmj4.com/news/local-news/milwaukee-among-8-cities-with-the-worst-pharmacy-desert-disparities-study-shows>.

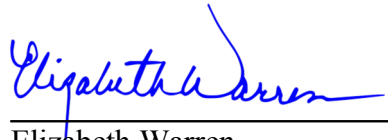
¹⁸ Esther Yoon-Ji Kang & Cheyanne M. Daniels, *supra* note 15.

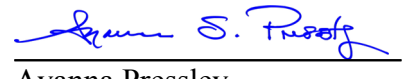
¹⁹ Julie Coleman, *Walgreens CEO says company is using its stores and bran to boost healthcare business*, CNBC (Jan 8, 2024), <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/01/08/walgreens-ceo-says-companys-stores-boost-growing-health-care-business.html>.

We look forward to continued conversation on this matter.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress