Statement from UF Health:

We appreciate Judge Watkins' ruling on additional trauma centers and continue to believe strongly in the arguments we have made throughout this case. Judge Watkins found that the Department of Health's provisional approval of Orange Park Medical Center's Level 2 trauma center neither established need nor followed the requirements of the five-county Northeast Florida region allocation plan. This only allocated one trauma center to the region, a role that has been long-served by UF Health Jacksonville's trauma center.

In addition to these legal considerations pertaining to Jacksonville, an additional important point for Florida as a whole is that when trauma centers are added in the absence of need, it has been shown they do not improve public safety or medical outcomes, but rather increase health care costs tremendously for all citizens.

A recent report presented at the 75th Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma concluded that, with introduction of five Level 2 trauma centers between 2010 and 2014, charges for trauma care in Florida increased by $1.7 billion. These additional health care costs are paid for in large part by the public, through increased health insurance premiums and increased Medicare and Medicaid expenses. At the same time, there is no evidence that the additional centers improved outcomes for those seeking trauma care.

When a trauma center is added to a region in the absence of need, costs escalate dramatically because the new center often will treat patients with conditions that are coded as trauma, with associated trauma activation fees and other charges, but who were previously successfully treated in local emergency rooms. Insight about this artificial rise in the trauma patient population can be seen from the natural experiment that played out in Jacksonville during the 2011-2013 timeframe. Until 2011, UF Health Jacksonville was the only trauma provider in the region. At that time, HCA – Orange Park opened a trauma center and for the next year the total number of trauma cases in the region increased by 800. Subsequently the HCA trauma center was temporarily closed by the state, so the community again had UF Health Jacksonville as its only trauma center. During the year after HCA closed its trauma center, UF Health Jacksonville again saw a volume of trauma cases that was roughly the same as before the HCA trauma center opened.

We respect the goal of reducing barriers for Floridians that are in need of immediate care due to severe injury and we want to ensure that our state has a high-quality trauma system for all injured patients. However, approving numerous high-cost trauma centers without establishing need or demonstrating superior outcomes may ultimately be detrimental to the goal.

Jacksonville has a trauma center that is nationally recognized for its excellence in clinical care, education and research – UF Health TraumaOne. For more than 30 years, we have been committed to carrying out our mission of providing the best trauma care possible, led by physicians and other caregivers who have extraordinary experience, knowledge, talent and compassion.