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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support of Rider and Tori McDowell's efforts to build a themed roadside stop on Highway 101 at Betabel Road, with the proceeds going to benefit childhood cancer research. I am a professor of cancer biology at the Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute in La Jolla, and Director of the Clayes Center for Neuro-Oncology and Genomics at Rady Children's Hospital of San Diego. In short, I am a scientist who is trying to find a cure for childhood brain tumors.

I first met Rider in 2017, when his son Errol suffered a recurrence of the brain tumor that he was diagnosed with several years before. Rider reached out to me to find out more about the disease, and to see if there was anything else he could do to help his son. Over the next 10 months, I communicated with Rider every week, by email, by phone, and in person. I shared whatever knowledge I could, helped translate complex scientific papers and evaluate possible therapies, and introduced him to colleagues who might have additional information. But whatever help I may have given him, I gained even more from my interactions with him. As a father of two kids (including one the same age as Errol), I was struck by Rider's deep love for his son, and by his willingness to do absolutely anything he could to save him: talking to scientists and doctors from around the world, cajoling drug company executives to make their drugs available, challenging philanthropists to support childhood cancer research, and contributing funds from his own charitable trust to accelerate the discovery of a cure. Although I had been studying this disease for many years, Rider brought home to me what the disease really means to patients and their families, and how important it is to keep fighting with everything we have until we eradicate this devastating disease.

In the end, Rider and Tori lost their battle. On June 13, 2018, Errol succumbed to medulloblastoma. The family was devastated, and all the scientists and doctors who had fought to save him grieved along with them. The McDowell's life will never be the same. But remarkably, Rider has not given up hope: he remains convinced that if we invest in research we can find a cure, and save other parents from the agony that he and Tori endured. It is with this goal in mind that he has devoted his efforts to the Betabel Road Project. His plan is to build a unique and exciting roadside stop that highlights local crops and crafts, and gives visitors a feeling of what California was like 70 years ago. But most importantly, all profits from the project will go to support childhood cancer research. This support is essential: the federal government spends only 4% of its research budget on childhood cancer, and my colleagues and I who work in this area often struggle to find the resources we need to move forward. We are so grateful to Rider for spearheading this effort, and hope that you will join him in his efforts to support childhood cancer research.

If you have any questions or need any other information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Robert Wechsler-Reya, Ph.D.