



September 6, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy and Leaders Jeffries, McConnell, and Schumer:

On behalf of the nearly 600,000 physicians our organizations represent, we greatly appreciate your commitment to support physicians and patient access to affordable, high quality health care. As we move into the final months of 2023, we believe it is critical for Congress to advance policies aimed at strengthening and diversifying the physician workforce.

The shortage and maldistribution of adult and pediatric primary care, psychiatric, and other high-need specialties limit patient access to cost-effective, preventive care, and these problems will become even more acute in the coming years if no action is taken. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the United States faces a projected physician shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034. Further, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) estimates that by 2025, there will be a shortage of over 250,000 mental health professionals, including psychiatrists.

As Congress returns from the August recess work period, we urge you to focus on:

- **Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S. 665).** This legislation would extend for three years the Conrad State 30 program, which allows states to request J-1 visa waivers for 30 foreign physicians per state, per year to work in federally designated shortage areas. The bill would also increase state allocations to 35 physicians

per year and provide flexibility to expand the number of waivers in states where demand exceeds that limit. This program is due for reauthorization on September 30, 2023.

- **Long-term reauthorization of the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program or the Doctors of Community (DOC) Act (H.R. 2569).** The THCGME program helps to attract and retain physicians in rural and medically underserved communities, while also addressing the issue of physician maldistribution. The THCGME program is the only federal program that invests in the training of physicians in a community setting. The program expires in FY24, and we urge Congress to move beyond the uncertainty caused by short-term reauthorizations of the program and toward permanent authorization and robust funding. This program is due for reauthorization on September 30, 2023.

Looking beyond the fiscal year deadline, there are additional pieces of legislation that our organizations urge Congress to pursue to address challenges facing the physician workforce. These include:

- **Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2023 (H.R. 2389/S. 1302),** which would gradually raise the number of Medicare-supported GME positions by 2,000 per year for seven years.
- **Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2023 (S.462),** which would make mental health practitioners eligible for the loan repayment program passed in the SUPPORT Act five years ago. That program provides loan forgiveness for substance use disorder treatment providers who practice in shortage areas.
- **Resident Education Deferred Interest (REDI) Act (H.R. 1202/S. 704),** which would allow borrowers to qualify for interest-free deferment on their student loans while in a medical or dental internship or residency program.
- **Rural Physician Workforce Production Act (S. 230/H.R. 834),** which would lift the current cap on Medicare reimbursement payments to rural hospitals that cover the cost of taking on residents, in order to alleviate the disadvantage that rural hospitals face when recruiting new medical professionals.

Further, as Congress presses forward with the FY2024 appropriations proceedings, we urge the House and Senate to join forces and provide discretionary funding based on the Senate 302(b) allocation levels. These funding levels will ensure programs linked to health care quality, outcomes, research, and workforce are well-positioned going into the new fiscal year.

We appreciate your consideration of these important health care issues. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact David Tully at dtully@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Pediatrics

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American College of Physicians

American Osteopathic Association

American Psychiatric Association