

July 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the American Association of College of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), thank you for your continued efforts to combat the devastating effects of COVID-19 on our country and your commitment to address future public health emergencies (PHEs).

Osteopathic medicine plays an essential role in the fabric of our healthcare system and is a growing field. Founded in 1898 to support and assist the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 37 colleges of osteopathic medicine—**educating nearly 31,000 future physicians, 25 percent of all U.S. medical students**—at 58 teaching locations in 33 U.S. states, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at U.S. medical centers, hospitals, clinics, and health systems.

The osteopathic community is on the front lines of the battle against COVID-19. Osteopathic medical educators and students are serving as first responders in medical facilities across the country and helping to treat COVID patients. As the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee works toward a bipartisan effort to improve the nation's public health infrastructure and preparedness for the next public health threat, AACOM strongly urges you to address the following urgent needs:

- Permanent eligibility for designated health professions students to administer vaccinations under supervision in the event of any future PHE
- Expansion of the future physician workforce through the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) Program, Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) and other physician training programs
- Student loan debt and economic relief during PHEs, including student loan debt repayment suspension and student loan forgiveness for frontline workers

### **Permanent Eligibility for Health Professions Student Vaccinators**

[Students Assist America \(SAA\)](#), an interprofessional initiative of 12 associations spearheaded by AACOM, successfully advocated for a Seventh Amendment to the *Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act* authorizing students from designated health professions to administer COVID-19 vaccinations. The amendment opened the door for almost one million skilled medical, nursing, pharmacy, dental, veterinary, physician assistant, optometry and other health professions students to administer COVID-19 vaccines with supervision.

**AACOM applauds the Biden Administration for this important change and strongly urges Congress to pass the *Student Assisted Vaccination Effort (SAVE) Act (S. 2114)*.** Introduced by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Susan Collins (R-ME), the *SAVE Act* would permanently authorize

health professions students to administer vaccinations and alleviate burdens on the healthcare workforce during future PHEs.

### **Expansion of the Future Physician Workforce**

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a robust physician workforce is essential to meet our nation's growing healthcare needs, especially in rural and underserved areas. To help address the physician shortage and prepare for future public health emergencies, AACOM urges Congress to expand the future physician workforce through:

- **Permanent and increased funding for the THCGME Program through the *Doctors of Community Act (S. 1958/H.R.3671)*** to expand the primary care physician workforce
- Removal of the statutory cap on Medicare-supported GME slots and increased residencies in rural and underserved areas through the ***Rural Physician Workforce Production Act of 2021 (S. 1893)***
- Increased Medicare-supported GME positions through the ***Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (S. 834/H.R. 2256)***
- Sustained funding for loan repayment and forgiveness programs, such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program and National Health Service Corps (NHSC), which incentivize physicians to practice in rural and medically underserved areas

### **Student Loan Debt and Economic Relief**

During public health emergencies, healthcare professionals risk their lives daily for the health of communities across the nation. Supporting our country's physicians and medical students by reducing their outstanding education debt during PHEs is certainly in the nation's interest. AACOM urges Congress to adopt sustainable solutions to preserve and enhance programs that address student debt and ease the financial burden placed on healthcare workers, including osteopathic medical school graduates, as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and future public health crises:

- Student loan debt relief for frontline healthcare workers responding to public health emergencies through the ***Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act (H.R. 2418)***
- Suspension of student loan payments and interest during public health emergencies, in which suspended monthly payments would count toward satisfying PSLF Program requirements

AACOM appreciates your consideration of these proposals and looks forward to continuing our work with you. For additional information, please contact David Bergman, JD, Vice President of Government Relations, at [dbergman@aacom.org](mailto:dbergman@aacom.org).

Sincerely,



Robert A. Cain, DO, FACOI, FAODME  
President and CEO