

August 20, 2020

The Honorable Tim Kaine  
United States Senate  
231 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Todd Young  
United States Senate  
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
United States Senate  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD  
United States Senate  
520 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Kaine, Young, Reed, and Cassidy:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), I offer strong support for S. 4349, the *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act*. Thank you for your commitment and leadership in introducing this vital legislation, which aims to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout, and mental and behavioral health conditions among health care professionals.

AACOM leads and advocates for the full continuum of osteopathic medical education to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 to support and assist the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 37 accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs)—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.

Understanding and addressing physician and other health care professional burnout, a condition that precedes and has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, is critical not only to health care professionals' well-being, but also to patient health and the optimal operation of our health care system. Physicians have long suffered from high rates of depression, burnout, addiction, and suicide. The current crisis has made circumstances far more dire as the health care workforce faces unprecedented challenges and unimaginable emotional and psychological distress responding to COVID-19. Too often, the stigma associated with seeking treatment for mental health care needs prevents physicians and other health care professionals from accessing life-saving care and resources, leaving them to suffer in silence. We must ensure that we are prioritizing and protecting the mental health of our health care workforce, particularly our frontline workers, who are risking their lives to protect us from this deadly pandemic and are at a significantly high risk of suffering from severe and potentially long-term symptoms of burnout and other mental health conditions.

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AACOM lauds your efforts in working to address the many factors contributing to this crisis. As medical educators training the future physician workforce, we appreciate S. 4349's efforts to raise awareness of the mental health issues plaguing our health care workforce, especially at such a stressful and critical period. Extending federal grant opportunities and supporting evidence-based training strategies will be a vital part of mitigating and addressing the bias and stigma associated with physician and other health care professional burnout. Further, assessing the efficacy of these interventions, as well as COVID-19's impact on mental and behavioral health, will better equip us to respond to future crises and contribute to a healthier, more resilient health care system. Ensuring that such federal programs are adopted throughout a health care professional's education, training, and career will set an important precedent that suicide, burnout, and other mental and behavioral health conditions are a priority and a concern.

Thank you for championing measures such as S. 4349 that promote physician and other health care professionals' well-being, especially at a time of global crisis. On behalf of AACOM, I offer our strong support for the *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act*, and I thank you for your steadfast leadership and dedication in addressing such an urgent need during this unprecedented time. We look forward to continuing our work with you as this legislation moves forward. For additional information, please contact Judith Mun, Director of Government Relations, at [jmun@aacom.org](mailto:jmun@aacom.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Cain, DO". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light gray rectangular box.

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