

November 16, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to share our support for two of the bills that the Committee will be discussing tomorrow, the “Data Mapping to Save Moms’ Lives Act” (H.R. 1218/S. 198) and the “Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act” (H.R. 1667/S. 610). The AMA commends you on the Committee’s ongoing, bipartisan efforts to address maternal health, mental health, and severe burnout among physicians and other health care professionals.

The AMA strongly supports the “Data Mapping to Save Moms’ Lives Act.” This legislation would instruct the Federal Communications Commission to consult with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to determine ways to incorporate data on maternal health outcomes for at least one year postpartum into broadband health mapping tools in an effort to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity in the U.S.

The AMA is committed to working with a variety of stakeholders to tackle the issues surrounding maternal mortality and morbidity. The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed countries, and according to the CDC, 60 percent or more of these maternal deaths are preventable. Furthermore, CDC data shows that Black and Indigenous women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women.

Our AMA is committed to promoting equitable access to telehealth services, especially for at-risk and under-resourced patient populations and communities. In [a recent survey by the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition](#), 79 percent of patient respondents reported satisfaction with their telehealth visit and 78 percent felt that their health concern could be addressed via telehealth.¹ Telehealth services can be especially helpful for new mothers, who are adapting to the demanding schedules of caring for an infant.

Commuting to a doctor’s office for a visit may require finding childcare for older children or require commuting long distances for those in rural or other underserved areas, which may deter some from seeking care. As a result of many of these and other challenges, 20-40 percent of women have difficulties attending these critical postpartum visits between three and eight weeks after delivery.² As such, the

¹ <https://c19hcc.org/static/catalog-resources/telehealth-patient-survey-analysis-c19hcc.pdf>.

² <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/telemedicine-and-pregnancy-care/>.

AMA supports ensuring new mothers have access to, and coverage of, telehealth services and broadband and internet-connected devices. Moreover, the AMA supports physician practices having access to broadband and internet-connected devices so that care providers can participate in telehealth, with the goal of reducing barriers to accessing postpartum care and addressing health disparities. This bill would examine the intersection of broadband access and maternal care delivery by requiring the United States Government Accountability Office to conduct a study that would provide much needed data on the effectiveness of internet connectivity in reducing maternal morbidity rates.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period will always carry some degree of risk. We as a nation must do all we can to minimize that risk and help ensure that mothers and their babies thrive throughout pregnancy and for the rest of their lives.

The AMA also expresses our strong support for the “Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act.” The AMA is deeply concerned about the intensifying mental health and burnout crisis among physicians and other health care professionals that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of all physicians in the United States [report](#) experiencing substantial symptoms of burnout, with the most severe symptoms occurring among those working at the front lines of medicine in fields such as emergency medicine, family medicine, and internal medicine. In addition, physicians are at a significantly increased [risk of suicide](#) compared to the general population, with suicide rates 40 percent higher in males and 130 percent higher in females.

Recent studies have shown that 49 percent of health care providers working directly with COVID-19 patients in Italy and China experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms. Moreover, about 20 percent of health care workers in the [studies](#) had symptoms of depression, anxiety, and high perceived stress. A [recent study](#) showed that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a median increase of 60 percent in physician emotional exhaustion when compared to pre-COVID levels. Although physicians have received accolades from their communities, numerous physicians [have described](#) feeling lost, alone, and unable to sleep. Not only are physicians in constant fear due to the uncertainty of their patients’ health, but there is also considerable anxiety surrounding the potential risks to their own health and the health of their families.

Bolstering our mental health infrastructure is essential to help support physicians and other health care providers who have been working tirelessly to heal our nation from the devastation brought on during the COVID-19 emergency. The “Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act” would help to achieve this goal by: establishing grants for health care professionals to help create evidence-based strategies to reduce burnout and the associated secondary mental health conditions related to job stress; establishing a national campaign to encourage health care professionals to prioritize their mental health and to use available mental and behavioral health services; establishing grants for employee education, peer support programming, and mental and behavioral health treatment; and commissioning a comprehensive study on the mental health and burn out of health care professionals, as well as barriers to seeking appropriate care.

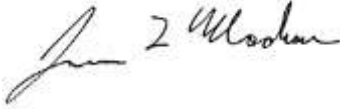
As the COVID-19 pandemic endures and physicians continue to face highly traumatic situations, our health care professionals should not have to suffer in silence. For these reasons, the AMA supports this legislation.

Thank you again for the Committee’s work on these critical issues and your continuing efforts to improve maternal health and support measures to improve mental health and prevent the burnout of physicians and

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other health care professionals. We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on these and other matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "L" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD