



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

TREATING OUR FAMILY AND YOURS



February 27, 2018

The Honorable Katherine Clark
U.S. House of Representatives
1415 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Clark:

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and Massachusetts Osteopathic Society (MOS), together represent more than 137,000 osteopathic physicians (DOs) and osteopathic medical students, including more than 1,100 DOs practicing in Massachusetts. We write to express our gratitude for your leadership in crafting the *Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act of 2018*, and for collaborating with AOA in developing the legislation. We applaud your initiative and strongly support your bipartisan efforts to strengthen our substance abuse treatment workforce and for providing greater access to care for patients who need them most.

As you are aware, overdoses from prescription opioids have dramatically increased in the United States. Today, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 40% of all U.S. opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid. In 2016, more than 46 people died every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids. Along with this growing epidemic is the continued shortage in our health care workforce. The Council of Graduate Medical Education projects a shortage of 85,000 physicians in 2020 – the impact of which will be more dramatic in rural communities.

The *Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act* addresses these critical issues by providing an additional path for health care providers to practice in rural and underserved communities, which allows for greater access to care for those suffering from substance use disorder. This legislation will strengthen rural health care systems and will improve access to care for patients in rural communities – a longstanding shared commitment of the osteopathic profession.

Osteopathic physicians in particular fill a critical need in our nation's health care system, as many practice in rural and underserved areas. Further, osteopathic physicians are trained in a "whole person" approach to care, which involves treating all aspects of a patient's illness or injury, including the use of nonpharmacologic treatment strategies for acute or chronic pain. With the focus on the whole patient as the guiding philosophy of osteopathic medicine, we believe that treatment strategies must be comprehensive and able to address each individual patient's needs.

We thank you for your leadership in authoring this important legislation that will help build a well-equipped workforce to combat the current rise in substance use disorders. The AOA and its members stand ready to assist you in securing its enactment into law.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Baker, DO
President, AOA

Mekkin Lynch, DO
President, MOS