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July 13, 2015

The Honorable Dan Benishek, MD
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States House of Representatives
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Benishek:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association, I am writing to express our deep concern with H.R. 1688, which is scheduled for a hearing before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health on Tuesday, July 14, 2015.

The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2015 (P.L. 113-146) included provisions to increase the number of graduate medical residency slots at Veterans' Affairs (VA) facilities by up to 1,500 over a five-year period, with an emphasis on positions in primary care, mental health, and other specialties that the Secretary deems appropriate. In carrying out this provision, the Secretary is to establish residency programs or ensure an adequate number of residency positions at any medical facility that is experiencing a shortage of physicians and is located in a health professional shortage area.

H.R. 1688 would divert a number of these medical residency positions to optometry in contradiction of the intent of Congress in enacting the Choice Act. On January 30, 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released the report "OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Occupations Staffing Shortages" as required by the Choice Act. The OIG determined that the number one need across VA facilities was Medical Officer (MD or DO).

Given both these findings and the specific intent of Congress to fund medical residency programs through section 301(b) of the Choice Act, we encourage the committee to not proceed with consideration of H.R. 1866. Thank you for consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

James L. Madara, MD