



September 3, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Murray and Pallone, and Ranking Members Burr and Rodgers:

On behalf of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the more than 168,000 osteopathic physicians (DOs) and osteopathic medical students we represent, we write express our support for the inclusion of the *Doctors of Community (DOC) Act* in the upcoming budget reconciliation. The AOA supports efforts to strengthen our nation's health care infrastructure to ensure access to quality affordable health care for all Americans regardless of income, age, race, disability, or zip code, and is committed to working with your committees to improve access to physician-led healthcare.

The AOA has a unique and important perspective on many of the issues being considered in the reconciliation process as DOs comprise one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing segments of the U.S. physician workforce. Over the past decade, the number of DOs has increased by 80 percent. Today, one in four medical students in the United States attending a college of osteopathic medicine and more than 65 percent of all DOs are under the age of 45. Current trends predict that DOs will comprise more than 20 percent of the U.S. physician workforce by 2030. Additionally, more than 40 percent of active DOs practice in non-primary care specialties.

As you are aware, numerous academic and advisory bodies have issued reports projecting the physician shortage worsening absent action to address this problem. While the precise number of physicians needed to fill the existing and projected workforce gaps is yet to be determined, there is little doubt that the nation's current graduate medical education system limits our ability to meet our future physician workforce needs. Furthermore, since most of the graduate medical education occurs in a small percentage of states and most resident-physicians practice in communities near the geographic location of their training, many states have an inherently limited ability to meet their future physician workforce needs.



To address physician shortages across the country, the AOA strongly recommends the inclusion of the *Doctors of Community (DOC) Act*, which would permanently extend funding for the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program and ensure sustainable funding and the addition of new teaching health centers (THCs). Residents who train in THC programs are far more likely to practice in the communities in which they have trained. Data shows that when compared to traditional postgraduate trainees, THCs residents are far more likely to practice primary care and remain in underserved or rural communities. THCGME programs not only play a vital role in training our next generation of primary care physicians but help to bridge our nation's physician workforce shortfall. The program also tackles the physician maldistribution problem and helps to address the need to attract and retain physicians in rural and medically underserved communities.

Osteopathic physicians feel incredibly connected to the practice of medicine in rural and underserved areas, considering that DOs make up roughly 11.5% of all physicians in the United States, they comprise 20% of the physician workforce in medically underserved communities. Strengthening the physician pipeline in rural and underserved communities is vital to improving health outcomes and the overall well-being within these populations.

Again, thank you for your dedicated leadership on this issue. The AOA and our members stand ready to assist you in the inclusion on this important legislation in the budget reconciliation. If you have any questions or if the AOA can be a resource, please contact AOA Senior Vice President of Public Policy, David Pugach, at DPugach@osteopathic.org or (202) 349-8753.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Giaimo, DO
President, AOA

Kevin M. Klauer, DO, EJD
Chief Executive Officer, AOA