



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
655 K Street NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20001
PAEAonline.org • 703-548-5538

March 22, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chair
House Education and Labor Committee
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
House Education and Labor Committee
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), the national organization representing all 238 accredited PA programs operating in the United States, we are writing to commend your bipartisan efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) this year. Since the last successful reauthorization effort of the HEA more than a decade ago, the landscape of PA education has changed significantly, reflected in the growth of the number of PA programs from approximately 150 in 2008 to 238 in 2019. While this considerable growth appropriately reflects national demand for PA clinicians, it has also presented new challenges for PA educators regarding faculty and clinical training site shortages and student diversity, among other issues. We are optimistic that a comprehensive reauthorization of the HEA will provide PA programs with the resources necessary to address these challenges and meet workforce demand. To that end, we would offer the following recommendations to the Education and Labor committee as your efforts advance this year:

Student Loans/Loan Repayment Options

A key challenge in the field of higher education, which, in part, provided the impetus for the original enactment of the Higher Education Act more than fifty years ago, is ensuring access to higher education for students regardless of socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, in the case of PA education, current federal student loan policy is not meeting the goal of ensuring equal access for PA

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students. Under current law, PA students are restricted to the same annual loan limit of \$20,500 reserved for non-health professions graduate students under the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan program. However, according to the most recent survey of PA programs conducted by PAEA, the median total tuition, on average, for 27-month, private PA programs is \$85,430. This disparity between the cost of PA education and the low-interest financing available under the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan program forces PA students to borrow through higher-interest loan programs with less favorable repayment terms.

Historically, Congress has recognized the increased costs associated with health professions education and allowed health professions students, including graduate public health and health administration students who often have lower tuition costs than PA students, access to more appropriate loan terms. **To address this issue, PAEA urges the committee to institute borrowing parity under the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan program for PA students in alignment with the borrowing limits afforded to their peers in the health professions.**

In addition to the issue of unequal access to the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan program for PA students, PAEA has major concerns with proposals raised in the 115th Congress to restrict the Grad PLUS loan and Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs. In the absence of borrowing parity within the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan program, PA students have traditionally relied upon Grad PLUS loans to meet their financial commitments. Furthermore, according to PAEA's most recent Student Report, more than 37% of graduating PA students who intended to participate in a federal/state loan forgiveness program indicated their likely participation in Public Service Loan Forgiveness in order to serve the nation's most vulnerable patients in exchange for educational debt reduction. **PAEA urges the committee to protect both the Grad PLUS loan program and Public Service Loan Forgiveness as its HEA reauthorization advances this year.**

PA Program Development at Minority Serving Institutions and Rural Serving Institutions

In accordance with our organization's vision of "health for all", PAEA is committed to ensuring the creation of a robust, diverse pipeline of future PAs who reflect the communities they will serve. We believe that the development of a diverse health workforce is critical to preventing unnecessary health disparities and promoting health equity. To this end, PAEA strongly supports the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act, sponsored by Congressmember Karen Bass, which would incentivize the development of PA programs at historically black colleges and universities, Predominantly Black Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, rural-serving Institutions, and other minority-serving institutions through both new and existing grant programs. **We ask for your support for the inclusion of such incentives in any HEA reauthorization bill considered by the committee.**



Faculty Development

A critical component of ensuring an optimal educational experience for the future PA workforce is the availability of a sufficient supply of qualified faculty. In PAEA's most recent Program Report, however, 60.2% of PA program directors indicated that a lack of qualified candidates was a serious or moderate barrier to recruiting new faculty. **To this end, PAEA was encouraged by the inclusion of faculty development incentives at Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Aim Higher Act introduced in the 115th Congress.**

In addition to this provision, **we strongly support the provisions included in the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act, which would authorize a three-year demonstration program to fund PA faculty preparation efforts within qualifying institutions and make practicing PAs eligible for loan repayment when serving as faculty in areas of national need. We urge the committee to include said provisions in any HEA reauthorization bill considered this year.**

State Authorization

To address the critical issue of clinical training site shortages for PA programs throughout the country, PAEA is committed to working with stakeholders to eliminate all unnecessary barriers to preceptors providing clinical training to PA students. Traditionally, our programs have cited state authorization requirements imposed on programs seeking to place students in out-of-state clinical sites for required rotations as a significant barrier. **As HEA reauthorization advances, we urge the committee to examine state authorization requirements and other barriers to the establishment of a sufficient supply of high-quality clinical training sites for PA programs and students.**

We appreciate the opportunity to share the priorities of PA educators throughout the country as HEA reauthorization in the 116th Congress advances and look forward to ongoing opportunities to engage with the committee as this effort continues. Should you require additional information or if you have questions, please contact Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith at tsmith@PAEAonline.org or (703) 667-4356.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Smith".

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timi Agar Barwick".



Jonathan Bowser, MS, PA-C
President

Timi Agar Barwick, MPM
Chief Executive Officer