



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
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PAEAonline.org • 703-548-5538

May 30, 2019

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
2367 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael Burgess
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Schakowsky and Burgess:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), the organization that represents all 243 accredited PA programs operating in the United States, we are writing to commend your leadership on the reauthorization of the health workforce development programs under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act. In the face of growing provider shortages, Title VII reauthorization offers an opportunity to address some of the most challenging barriers confronting health professions education, and H.R. 2781 — the EMPOWER for Health Act — represents your firm commitment to bolstering the national health workforce. As the reauthorization effort advances in this Congress, we welcome the opportunity to offer specific thoughts on several provisions of the legislation:

Reauthorized Title VII Programs and Clinical Training Site Shortages

As PA programs throughout the country work to prepare the future health workforce, key priorities for our members include incentivizing primary care practice among PA graduates, promoting health equity through workforce diversity, and ensuring a sufficient supply of high-quality clinical training sites. **We therefore applaud your support of, and increased authorization levels for, Primary Care Training and Enhancement grants, Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students, the Health Careers Opportunity Program, Faculty Loan Repayment, and Area Health Education Centers.**

While H.R. 2781 specifically prioritizes the work of Area Health Education Centers to facilitate clinical rotations for health professions programs by increasing the program's authorization by more than 7%

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over its FY19 enacted level, **we believe it is critical to further invest in clinical training site capacity in a comprehensive reauthorization effort.**

Due to health system consolidation and increasing administrative burdens on practicing clinicians, health professions programs are increasingly forced to pay for clinical rotations with students bearing the ultimate cost in the form of increased debt. According to a recent PAEA report, 54.6% of PA programs have either considered increasing or already increased tuition due to the growing burden of clinical training site payments.¹

To begin to address this challenge, **PAEA is supportive of additional measures being considered within a health workforce package to increase clinical rotation availability — such as the demonstration proposed in H.R. 1686, the Physician Assistant Education Public Health Initiatives Act of 2019.** This demonstration program would address clinical site shortages and incentivize PA practice in rural and underserved areas by financing clinical rotations in federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, and critical access hospitals thereby both addressing the key challenge facing PA programs and promoting access to care for patients in underserved settings.

Pediatric Loan Repayment Program

According to the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, over 3,000 PAs currently work in pediatrics, pediatrics subspecialties, or adolescent medicine, and all PA students are required² to complete clinical rotations in pediatrics and behavioral health. However, the authorization for the Pediatric Loan Repayment program does not explicitly state that PAs are among the qualified health professionals practicing in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health who are eligible to participate in the program. To continue promoting PA practice in child and adolescent behavioral health, **we urge you to ensure that PAs are explicitly eligible to participate in the Pediatrics Loan Repayment program as the legislation advances.**

We thank you once again for your leadership on health workforce development through the introduction of the EMPOWER for Health Act and look forward to ongoing opportunities to collaborate with your offices to promote timely access to high-quality care for patients. Should you require

¹ Physician Assistant Education Association, *By the Numbers: Curriculum Report 3: Data from the 2017 Clinical Curriculum Survey*, Washington, DC: PAEA; 2018. doi: 10.17538/CR3.2017.001.

² National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, *2018 Statistical Profile of Certified Physician Assistants*, Johns Creek, GA: NCCPA; 2018.

<http://prodcmsstoragesa.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/files/2018StatisticalProfileofCertifiedPhysiciaAssistants.pdf>



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 "Jonathan Bowser". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jonathan Bowser, MS, PA-C
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timi Agar Barwick". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Timi Agar Barwick, MPM
Chief Executive Officer