



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Senators Casey, Murray, Brown, Udall, and Peters:

On behalf of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), representing all 254 accredited PA programs, which collectively graduate more than 10,000 new PAs each year, we are writing to commend your leadership in proposing a COVID-19 Heroes Fund to support frontline health care providers and bolster recruitment incentives. At a time of unique challenges for our health care workforce, your support for providers is greatly appreciated.

As PAs across the country work to combat COVID-19, we would like to draw your attention to the impact of the pandemic on health professions education and the pipeline of future providers available to respond to both COVID-19 and future public health crises. To protect students and conserve limited supplies of personal protective equipment, a significant proportion of PA programs have been forced to cancel clinical rotations for students — the training experiences required for students to graduate and begin to serve patients.

PAEA is highly concerned about the ripple effect that delayed clinical rotations will have on our nation's supply of health care providers as the pandemic continues. We anticipate that many students close to completing their education will be forced to postpone graduation, that students will bear increased

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costs and lower income potential from delayed employment, and that future cohorts of students will be restricted as a result of limited clinical training site capacity. Because of accreditation standards and the concentrated 27-month curriculum of PA programs, early graduation is not possible for PA students as it is for medical students, who have greater flexibility in their final year of education.

PAEA believes it is critical to ensure that our future health workforce is not burdened with increased debt as a result of unavoidable graduation delays. As you seek to increase recruitment of frontline providers, we urge you to expand eligibility for the Heroes Fund recruitment incentive to health professions students who agree to serve in a defined essential capacity upon graduation. Beyond the proposed Heroes Fund recruitment incentive, PAEA also supports including student debt forgiveness for PA and other health professions students in Phase 4 legislation designed to respond to COVID-19. Through both these targeted incentive payments and broad debt forgiveness, the financial impact of the pandemic on the future health workforce can be mitigated.

In addition to relief for students as the pandemic recedes, the rapid reconstitution of clinical training site capacity will be critical to avoid long-term disruptions in the training of our health workforce. PAEA urges you to prioritize direct payments or tax incentives - a model with state-level precedents - to clinicians in exchange for training PA and other health professions students and to increase investments in existing programs such as Primary Care Training and Enhancement grants and Area Health Education Centers in upcoming legislation.

We welcome the opportunity to serve as a continued resource to you and your staff on COVID-19 and other health workforce issues. Should you have specific questions, or if you would like additional information, please contact Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith at 703-667-4356 or tsmith@PAEAonline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Straker".

Howard Straker, EdD, MPH, PA-C
President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Jo Bondy".

Mary Jo Bondy, DHEd, MHS, PA-C
Chief Executive Officer