



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
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Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Hearing on “Homecoming: The Historical Roots and Continued Contributions of HBCUs”
October 6, 2021

The Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), representing the 277 accredited physician assistant (PA) programs in the United States, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on the critical role played by historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in supporting the development of a diverse health workforce.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for solutions to combat persistent health inequities has grown increasingly urgent. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color has compelled both the provider community and policymakers to examine key drivers of health disparities based upon race and ethnicity and the options available to eliminate them. In alignment with the Association’s vision of Health for All, PAEA is proud to play a leadership role in advocating for federal higher education policies built upon a cornerstone of health equity.

A critical component of promoting better health outcomes for all patients is ensuring that the health workforce appropriately reflects the communities it serves and is fully equipped to provide culturally competent care. However, long-standing socioeconomic barriers throughout health professions education have significantly limited diversity among first-year

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students and, ultimately, the provider workforce. According to PAEA's most recent student survey, approximately 4% of matriculating PA students identify as Black or African American compared to over 13% of the general population.¹ A key priority for PAEA is removing structural barriers that prevent underrepresented minority students from matriculating, completing their program, and entering the workforce to begin providing care in their communities.

By cultivating a supportive atmosphere committed to academic achievement, HBCUs are uniquely equipped to recruit and retain underrepresented minority students as well as to have a sustained impact on the demographic composition of the health workforce. PAEA is proud to represent PA programs at leading HBCUs throughout the country including those at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, the Morehouse School of Medicine, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and Xavier University of Louisiana. These programs, building upon the remarkable history of their sponsoring institutions, embody excellence in PA education, and, with dedicated federal support, can strengthen their efforts to grow a more representative provider workforce.

To this end, PAEA urges the committee to support H.R. 2274 - the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act - which would prioritize PA program development through support already provided by the federal government to HBCUs. In addition to capacity building for existing programs, H.R. 2274 would also facilitate support for other HBCUs to create PA programs of their own. Any expansion of PA programs at these institutions would only serve to further enhance the progress that existing programs have made in improving workforce diversity and promoting health equity.

As the Committee works to support HBCUs and strengthen their long track record of contributions to their communities, PAEA looks forward to serving as a resource. Should you require additional information or have questions, please contact Tyler Smith, Director of Government Relations, at tsmith@PAEAonline.org or 703-667-4356.

¹ Physician Assistant Education Association. (2020). *By the Numbers: Student Report 4: Data from the 2019 Matriculating Student and End of Program Surveys*. <https://paeaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/imported-files/student-report-4-updated-20201201.pdf>.