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Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety
“Recruiting, Revitalizing & Diversifying: Examining the Health Care Workforce Shortage”
February 10, 2022

The Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), representing the 282 accredited physician assistant (PA) programs in the United States, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding health care provider shortages and health workforce diversity.

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implications of chronic underinvestment in the development of our nation’s health workforce have been starkly illustrated. As hospital systems have been overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, an already insufficient supply of frontline providers has faced unprecedented demands, leading to significant burnout among clinicians and reduced access to needed care for patients. As Congress seeks to develop policy to improve preparedness for future public health threats, ensuring the availability of a sufficient supply of well-trained, diverse providers must be a top priority.

To effectively respond to the issue of workforce shortages, Congress must take immediate action to address the most urgent challenges limiting both the overall number of graduates being produced by health professions programs and the diversity of matriculants. **As PA**

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programs have sought to expand, the most challenging barrier that they have consistently encountered is the availability of clinical training sites necessary for students to complete their required rotations. As a condition of graduation, every PA student is required to complete a series of clinical training experiences in family medicine, emergency medicine, internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, women’s health, and behavioral/mental health. According to a recent survey of PA programs, however, more than 85% of respondents indicated that their clinical training sites are now taking fewer students than prior to the pandemic.¹ This dramatic reduction in clinical education capacity threatens the ability of PA programs to meet the demand of health systems for graduates and must be addressed to reduce projected shortages.

Beyond addressing clinical education limitations, PAEA strongly supports congressional action to help develop pathways to PA education for underrepresented minority (URM) students. According to PAEA’s most recent Student Report, only 3.9% of first-year PA students identified as Black or African American while 9.1% identified as Hispanic or Latino as of 2019.² Federal policy can play a critical role in addressing the barriers that have long prevented URM students from matriculating into PA programs, successfully graduating, and providing care to the communities most in need.

To address these challenges, PAEA has endorsed legislation in both the House and Senate. PAEA would encourage the subcommittee to advance the following legislation that has been introduced in the Senate and integrate that which has been introduced in the House into broader legislative proposals.

The Perinatal Workforce Act (S. 287)

To combat significant rates of maternal morbidity and mortality among Black women, Senators Tammy Baldwin and Jeff Merkley introduced the Perinatal Workforce Act in 2021. This bill is intended to ensure the provision of culturally competent care by facilitating the

¹ Physician Assistant Education Association. (2021). *COVID-19 Rapid Response Report 3*. <https://paea.edcast.com/insights/ECL-c621408d-c82a-43f5-a067-75a03494d8be>.

² 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>.



recruitment and retention of maternal care providers that are reflective of the communities that they serve. To break down barriers facing URM students seeking to become health care providers, the bill would authorize \$15 million annually over five years to support PA and other programs training students intending to specialize in obstetrics/gynecology/women's health. This bill would support training experiences, scholarship aid, and other interventions proven to significantly contribute to the success of URM students.

The Physician Assistant Education Public Health Initiatives Act (H.R. 3890)

In response to the growing issue of clinical site shortages, Rep. Karen Bass introduced the Physician Assistant Education Public Health Initiatives Act in mid-2021. Based upon the success of the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education program in retaining physicians in underserved communities after the completion of their residency training, this bill would authorize a Rural and Underserved Clinical Training Demonstration at \$5 million annually over five years. This funding would allow PA programs to facilitate partnerships with federally qualified health centers, critical access hospitals, and rural health clinics to both immediately expand clinical site access and build a sustained pipeline of graduates to these underserved settings following the completion of their training.

The Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act (H.R. 2274)

Under the Higher Education Act, existing sources of aid intended to support minority-serving institutions explicitly prioritize the development of programs for certain named high-demand professions, not including the PA profession. In early 2021, Rep. Karen Bass and Rep. David Trone the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act, which would explicitly prioritize PA program development at minority-serving institutions, such as historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions, to create a sustainable pipeline of diverse PA graduates to the health workforce.

PAEA appreciates the opportunity to share the Association's perspective on effective policy solutions to promote the development of a sufficient supply of diverse health care providers and looks forward to the opportunity to serve as a resource to the subcommittee. Should you require additional information or have questions, please contact Tyler Smith, Senior Director of Government Relations, at tsmith@PAEAonline.org or 703-667-4356.