



**PA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

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March 16, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of the PA Education Association (PAEA), the national organization representing all 300 accredited PA programs in the United States, we are writing in response to your recent request for information pertaining to the current health care provider shortage and policy recommendations to strengthen the workforce. At a time of great challenges for the nation's health care system, PAEA applauds the committee for its dedicated efforts to better understand these underlying issues and welcomes the opportunity to provide the Association's perspective on potential solutions.

The PA profession was founded more than 50 years ago in response to an acute shortage of primary care physicians. Based upon an accelerated medical training model that allows PAs to switch specialties as workforce needs evolve, the typical PA education program is 27 months in duration divided between classroom-based training and a series of clinical rotations in family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women's health, behavioral health, emergency medicine, surgery, and other electives. Despite the PA profession's unique ability to address workforce shortages as they arise, barriers such as a lack of resources for PA programs to produce well-prepared graduates and a lack of financial support for graduates

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who are interested in practicing in rural and underserved areas greatly inhibit this potential. As the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee works to strengthen the health workforce in the 118th Congress, PAEA would like to offer the following recommendations for the committee's consideration.

### **National Health Service Corps Funding**

In order to prevent an upcoming lapse in mandatory funding at the end of fiscal year 2023, Congress must prioritize a long-term extension the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) by this fall. The NHSC has been one of the most significant federal investments in workforce distribution for over 50 years, providing loan repayment and scholarship agreements to clinicians and students who commit to practicing in underserved communities. In 2021, Congress invested \$800 million in supplemental funding for the NHSC's scholarship and loan repayment programs, resulting in a 55% increase in field strength from 13,053 providers in fiscal year 2019 to 20,215 providers in fiscal year 2022.<sup>1</sup> However, the depletion of this supplemental appropriation and the impending expiration of the NHSC's mandatory authorization could limit access to care as workforce shortages continue to worsen. **PAEA urges the HELP Committee to support the enactment of the bipartisan Restoring America's Health Care Workforce and Readiness Act, which includes a three-year reauthorization that would double the mandatory NHSC funding in FY24 and increase funding up to \$825 million in FY26.**

### **Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act**

In addition to extending the mandatory authorization for the NHSC, Congress must invest in health professions education to meet the national demand for graduates. Specifically, Congress should ensure that PA programs have enough qualified faculty to provide specialized education in areas of high demand and offer clinical training opportunities to produce practice-ready graduates. A recent survey of PA programs revealed that over 50% of respondents are struggling to secure clinical rotations in family medicine and other high-need settings, highlighting the need for congressional support to strengthen educational capacity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. (2022). Bureau of Health Workforce Field Strength and Students and Trainees Dashboards. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/field-strength>.

<sup>2</sup> PA Education Association. (2021). COVID-19 Rapid Response Report 4. <https://paea.edcast.com/insights/covid-19-rapid-response-report-4>.



Recognizing the unique healthcare needs of older Americans and the capability of the PA profession to provide this care, PAEA supports the bipartisan Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act. This legislation would enhance faculty development, clinical training experiences, and didactic curriculum development for students in interprofessional palliative and hospice care. **Given the critical shortage of elder care professionals, PAEA urges the committee to advance this legislation in the 118th Congress.**

### **Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act**

Besides investing in palliative care training, it is crucial to also promote workforce diversity to ensure a strong and well-trained healthcare workforce. Historically, individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups have faced significant obstacles in entering and completing health professions programs. The lack of representation among graduates affects the ability of the future workforce to deliver culturally competent care, making it a top priority for PAEA to break down barriers to diverse PA student cohorts.

To this end, PAEA has endorsed the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, critical legislation aimed at addressing maternal health disparities. The act seeks to expand perinatal health professional programs and provide scholarships to students interested in pursuing careers in obstetrics and gynecology. **As part of a comprehensive health workforce strategy, PAEA supports the continued advancement of the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act in the 118th Congress.**

### **PA Higher Education Modernization Act**

To fully maximize the potential of the PA profession in addressing health workforce shortages, it is necessary to implement reforms that address long-standing exclusions of the profession from vital federal programs. In line with this goal, PAEA supports the PA Higher Education Modernization Act, comprehensive legislation that seeks to address key components of the Higher Education Act. The PA Higher Education Modernization Act would make investments in program development at historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions that have previously excluded PA programs. The bill also aims to reduce financial barriers for students by restoring access to subsidized direct loans for PA and other graduate-level health professions students, thus limiting long-term borrowing costs. **As a final component a comprehensive workforce solution, PAEA urges the HELP committee to support the PA Higher Education Modernization Act.**



We appreciate the opportunity to share the Association's perspective on effective strategies to address health care workforce shortages and would welcome further collaboration with the committee to achieve this critical goal. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Senior Director of Government Relations Tyler Smith at [tsmith@PAEAonline.org](mailto:tsmith@PAEAonline.org) or at 703-667-4356.

Sincerely,

*Linda Sekhon*

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