



**PA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

655 K Street NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20001

PAEAonline.org • 703-548-5538

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**Statement for the Record**

**Submitted to**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

**Hearing entitled, "What Can Congress Do to Address the Severe Shortage of Minority Health Care Professionals and the Maternal Health Crisis?"**

**May 2, 2024**

The PA Education Association (PAEA), representing the 309 accredited PA programs in the United States, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record concerning policy steps Congress can take to strengthen health workforce diversity and improve maternal health outcomes.

This hearing comes at a time of unprecedented challenges in ensuring access to high-quality maternal health care for patients. According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States continues to grapple with an unacceptable maternal mortality rate of 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births with a significant discrepancy evident between non-Hispanic Black women and their white counterparts. As of 2021, the maternal mortality rate for non-Hispanic Black women stands at 2.6 times higher, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to rectify this disparity.<sup>1</sup> While the roots of this crisis are multifactorial, a significant contributor is inadequate access to timely, culturally sensitive care, the result of a shortage of maternal health providers who mirror the diversity of the populations they serve.

To begin reversing maternal health disparities, it is critical for Congress to take decisive action to break down barriers to health professions education for students from underrepresented

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.htm>.

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communities. PAEA strongly supports both S. 1606 - the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act - and its component legislation - S. 1710 - the Perinatal Workforce Act. These bills would provide significant resources to support both student scholarships and PA program operations, allowing institutions across the country to contribute to diversifying the future health workforce while ensuring high-quality OB/GYN training for students. By ensuring the enactment of this legislation, Congress can take substantial strides to ensure the availability of culturally competent care for patients in need.

In addition to legislation aimed at increasing the supply of maternity care providers, PAEA also supports additional policy steps to ensure that both institutions and students can meaningfully contribute to achieving the broader goal of a representative health workforce. Congress must increase the amount of available funding for health professions programs at historically Black colleges and university, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions to promote the creation of a durable pipeline of providers who reflect the communities they will go on to serve. PAEA further supports increased funding for Title VII programs such as the Health Careers Opportunity Program and Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students, both of which have a long track record in supporting pathways to the health professions for students from marginalized communities. Through these comprehensive steps, Congress can demonstrate its commitment to ensuring high-quality, equitable care for all patients.

PAEA welcomes the opportunity to continue engaging with members and staff on this critical work. Should you require additional information or have questions, please contact Tyler Smith, Senior Director of Government Relations, at [tsmith@PAEAonline.org](mailto:tsmith@PAEAonline.org) or 703-667-4356.