

February 19, 2009

The Honorable Peter Orszag, Ph.D.
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Dr. Orszag:

On behalf of the five organizations representing family medicine, we urge a robust investment in the primary care medicine and dentistry training grants for fiscal year 2010. We are grateful to President Barack Obama for making a strong health care workforce a key component of his agenda and recommend that his FY 2010 budget request propose \$215 million for primary care training under Title VII, section 747 of the Public Health Services Act.

The sixth report of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Advisory Committee on Training in Primary Care Medicine and Dentistry recommended an annual minimum level of \$215 million for the Title VII, section 747 grant program. The Committee reasoned that "Title VII funds are essential to support major primary care training programs that train the providers who work with vulnerable populations. It is critical that funds not only be restored to 2005 levels, but that funding be increased, as the need for healthcare of the public, including those high-risk groups identified in this report, increases. It is critical that funds offset the acknowledged rate of inflation. This additional funding is also necessary to prepare current and future primary care providers for their critical role in responding to healthcare challenges including demographic changes in the population, increased prevalence of chronic conditions, decreased access to care, and a need for effective first-response strategies in instances of acts of terrorism or natural disasters."

Both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Medicare Payment Advisory Committee (MedPAC) have noted research indicating that access to primary care is associated with better health outcomes and lower health care costs. Yet we have seen a decline in U.S. health care professionals entering primary care.

Title VII, section 747, administered by HRSA, is the only federal program aimed directly at training primary care physicians, dentists and physician assistants. On December 12, 2008, the Institute of Medicine released "HHS in the 21st Century: Charting a New Course for a Healthier America," which points to the drastic decline in Title VII funding. The IOM describes HRSA's workforce training programs as "an undervalued asset."



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Phone: (202) 232-9033
www.aafp.org



Society of Teachers
of Family Medicine

Phone: (202) 986-3309
www.stfm.org



Association of
Departments of
Family Medicine

Phone: (202) 986-3309
www.adfammed.org



Association of
Family Medicine
Residency Directors

Phone: (202) 986-3309
www.afmrd.org



North American
PRIMARY CARE
RESEARCH GROUP

Phone: (202) 986-3309
www.napcrgr.org

Although our nation is facing a growing shortage of primary care physicians, annual appropriations for Title VII, section 747 have steadily eroded in real dollars since 2003. Increasing the level of federal funding for primary care training would reinvigorate medical education, residency programs, as well as academic and faculty development in primary care to prepare physicians to support the patient centered medical home model.

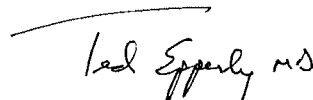
Under the previous Administration, OMB aggregated more than 40 separate programs authorized under Title VII in 2002 using its Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) and labeled the program as ineffective. In fact, data show that medical schools and primary care residency programs funded by Title VII, section 747 disproportionately serve as the medical education pipeline that produces physicians who go on to work in Community Health Centers and participate in the National Health Service Corps to treat underserved populations. This program clearly meets its goal to produce more primary care providers.

The conference agreement on the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* included a provision to increase funding for a number of Title VII programs. We hope that HRSA will double the funds available for the Title VII, section 747 grant program as the House Report on H.R. 1 recommended. However, as the appropriations allocated in the stimulus package will not increase the budget baseline, we strongly urge the President to request in his budget a robust increase in primary care medicine training grant funds if we are to meet the nation's health care workforce needs.

Sincerely,



Scott Fields, MD
President
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine



Ted D. Epperly, MD
President
American Academy of Family Physicians



Elissa Palmer, MD, President
Association of Family Medicine
Residency Directors



Allen Dietrich, MD, President
North American Primary Care
Research Group



Jeffrey Borkan, MD, PhD, President
Association of Departments of
Family Medicine