



October 17, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents 134,600 family physicians and medical students across the country, I write to share our request that the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program be reauthorized as swiftly as possible.

We are pleased the program was extended within HR 4378, the *Continuing Appropriations Act, 2020, and Health Extenders Act of 2019*, but there is a growing concern that any further delay might undermine current recruitment efforts or increase administrative challenges. In previous years, as a result of Congressional inaction, THCGME programs reduced resident positions and closed programs.

Thanks to bipartisanship Congressional leadership, programs are now more stable. It is our hope to build on that success and ensure that programs can operate at full capacity. Currently, THCGME program directors across the nation are meeting prospective residents for their 2020 matriculating classes. At the same time, applicants are evaluating programs to determine where they will complete their family medicine residency training. Although the recruitment process ends in March of 2020, actions taken by Congress in the next few weeks could substantially influence residents' and program directors' decisions. As prospective residents interview and consider their options, we are aware that some candidates inquire about the THCGME program's funding status and are dissuaded from selecting THC's because of the current uncertainty. These next several weeks will also be important for residency program directors who must determine the number of positions needed for the 2020-2021 academic year without complete information.

Having a successful recruitment process means that THC programs can attract the best candidates who are interested in serving in medically-underserved communities. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, most THC residents (82 percent) spent part of their training in medically underserved and/or rural communities, providing over 950,000 hours of patient care.

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We understand there are many complexities associated with extending this and other public health programs. However, we would stress that continued Congressional inaction is not without consequences. We hope that you will consider the need for urgency at this time. Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns. For more information, please contact Sonya Clay at 202-655-4905 or sclay@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Cullen".

John S. Cullen, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair