June 2, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Murray and Chairman Pallone:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents 133,500 family physicians and medical students across the country, I write to share our organization's strong support for your bicameral legislation, the Doctors of Community (DOC) Act.

Your legislation would permanently extend and expand the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program, which has played a vital role in training the next generation of primary care physicians and addressing the physician shortage. The AAFP has long advocated for a permanent extension of the THCGME Program to ensure stability for teaching health centers and the residents they train.

The U.S. will need up to 55,200 additional primary care physicians by 2033 in order to meet the health care needs of our growing and aging population.[1] The THCGME program is one of the most successful and efficiently run programs in the country and has a proven track record of achieving its legislative mandate to train the next generation of primary care physicians. To date, the THCME program has trained more than 1,148 primary care physicians and dentists, 65 percent of whom are family physicians. Additionally, THCGME graduates are more likely to continue practicing primary care medicine and serving in medically underserved communities than those in traditional Medicare GME-supported programs.

Primary care is the only health care component where an increased supply is associated with better population health and more equitable outcomes. Despite these benefits, only about 5 percent of overall health care expenditures is invested in primary care.[2] The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the urgency of building and financing a robust, well-trained, and accessible primary care system in our country. The DOC Act will help address the primary care workforce shortage in communities that need them the most – rural and medically underserved communities.

The AAFP applauds the introduction of the DOC Act and stands ready to help you pass this important legislation. If you have questions, please contact John Aguilar, Manager of Legislative Affairs, at jaguilar@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP

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Board Chair, American Academy of Family Physicians

[1] Dall, T., Reynolds, R., Chakrabarti, R., Jones, K., & Iacobucci, W. (2020, June 26). The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections From 2018 to 2033. AAMC. https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-aamc-report-confirmsgrowing-physician-shortage.

[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2021. Implementing High-Quality Primary Care: Rebuilding the Foundation of Health Care. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/25983.