

July 23, 2020

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

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

As COVID-19 continues to affect communities across America, it is essential that the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education program (THCGME) has the funding and resources needed to ensure residents continue to care for vulnerable populations. The stellar performance of the nation's teaching health center (THC) medical residents during their COVID-19 baptism by fire warrants inclusion of a robust multi-year extension for the THCGME program in the comprehensive COVID-19 emergency response funding bill Congress is developing this month.

We are very grateful that in March Congress extended funding for the THCGME program through November 30, 2020. However, without the assurance of a long-term authorization, residents at the nation's 63 THCs, and the hundreds of thousands of patients who annually depend upon them for care, will continue to face uncertainty as the expiration date looms. The laudable efforts of these residents during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to validate the THCGME program, and Congress must do all that it can to support the nation's ability to train future physicians. In fact, nearly all residents received training in a primary care setting, primarily Community Health Centers, and 80 percent of residents trained in a medically underserved community and/or rural community.

A recent study published by the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health, "An Unexpected Education: Teaching Health Center Training in a Global Pandemic," provides excellent insight into how THC residents pivoted to new ways of providing medical care during the COVID-19 crisis, including caring for thousands of patients with respiratory illness and keeping them out of already overcrowded emergency rooms and hospitals, screening and testing patients at their community health care centers and adopting telehealth for countless individuals with chronic diseases as well as acute complaints.

Accordingly, we believe a five-year extension deserves inclusion in the upcoming COVID-19 emergency appropriations bill at the levels contained in bipartisan reauthorization bills introduced by Senators Collins and Tester and Representatives Ruiz and McMorris Rodgers. As a result of revenue losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a five-year reauthorization at these levels is critically needed to cover increased residency costs, add residents in existing programs, and provide for growth of the program to new communities.

The organizations that sponsor THC's are nonprofits with low profit margins and significant local needs. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, THC's faced challenges budgeting and planning for the recruitment of new medical residents due to numerous short-term funding extensions over the past decade. They continue to balance uncertain federal funding, which has been compounded by significant COVID-19 financial losses that threaten their stability and ability to train the next generation of physicians. Long-term increased THCGME funding will ensure that residents at the nation's 63 THC's can continue training and providing the life-saving work of screening and testing patients at community health care clinics for COVID-19, adapting telehealth for high-risk individuals with chronic diseases, and supporting the nation's pandemic recovery efforts

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

American Association of Teaching Health Centers
American Academy of Family Physicians
Council of Academic Family Medicine
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Society of General Internal Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
National Association of Community Health Centers