



FamMedPAC Board Member 2020 Annual Report

Student/Resident Member of the Family Medicine PAC Board of Directors

Student/Resident

Michelle Byrne, MD/MPH

Northwestern/McGaw Family Medicine Residency Program in Humboldt Park

Chicago, IL

Class of 2020

The FamMedPAC is the federal political action committee of the American Academy of Family Physicians. PAC's are set up to fundraise money and then pool those funds to strategically make contributions to federal election campaigns and organizations. FamMedPAC's goal is to advance the AAFP's legislative agenda and broaden the AAFP's visibility with Congress. It plays a vital role in the AAFP's work by supporting Congressional candidates who share a commitment to family medicine and are aligned with the AAFP's priorities. Due to election laws, membership dues to the AAFP cannot be used for donations to political candidates, so the PAC's fundraising is entirely separate.

FamMedPAC was created by the AAFP Congress of Delegates in 2005 and has continued to grow each year, raising and contributing over \$6 million since then. In 2019, FamMedPAC became a "million-dollar PAC" by raising over \$1,000,000 within the year. The FamMedPAC Board of Directors has set a goal of becoming the 5th largest medical specialty PAC by the end of the 2020 election cycle. Each year, the AAFP's Commission on Federal and State Policy (previously the Commission on Governmental Advocacy) develops a legislative and regulatory work plan that focuses on issues critical to AAFP members. The determined legislative and regulatory agenda for 2019-2020 includes: Healthcare coverage for all, primary care investment, reducing administrative burden, rural health, medical liability reform, workforce, and graduate medical education. Candidates who seek a contribution from FamMedPAC are required to complete a questionnaire about their views on these issues in order to determine their eligibility for a contribution.

The Student and Resident Congresses have been vocal over the past several years about their desire for student and resident representation on the FamMedPAC, as well as increased transparency in its work. As a result of resolutions passed at National Conference, the FamMedPAC opened the conversation about having a seat for a student and/or resident on their Board of Directors. I had the opportunity to attend their February 2019 Board meeting to advocate for this, and after this meeting a seat was formally created and received approval from the AAFP Board of Directors. It was determined that a student or resident would hold the role for a two-year term which will align with a full Congress meeting (i.e. the first term would be from January 2021 through January 2023 in conjunction with the 117th Congress). The first application process for this role will occur this summer (I will continue to keep the seat warm until the first student/resident is selected!)

As the first student/resident member of the FamMedPAC Board, I was warmly welcomed, and it was encouraging to see the enthusiasm the Board has for including the perspectives of trainees. Over my term, I have participated in the main work of the PAC which is to raise money, and then distribute that money to candidates. Often this comes in the form of reviewing a candidate and providing input as to whether or not the PAC should approve a contribution to the candidate. Like many other student and resident leaders, I know that my time in this role has been largely defined by COVID-19. Some of the major work of the PAC is to attend large AAFP meetings in order to talk about the PAC's work and

encourage members to contribute. Additionally, a lot of large political meetings (such as the Republican and Democratic National Conventions) have been modified.

FamMedPAC received \$507,079 in donations from 2,619 AAFP members in 2019, the highest amount ever received in the off year of the two-year election cycle. The average donation was \$194. From January 1, 2020, to June 5, 2020, FamMedPAC received \$243,573 in donations from 1,178 AAFP members, which is slightly less than the same period in 2019, likely resulting from canceled events and other challenges with the pandemic. From January 1, 2019, to June 5, 2020, FamMedPAC made \$464,500 in campaign contributions to 118 candidates and committees from 40 states, 66% to Democratic candidates or committees, and 34% to Republican candidates or committees.

When I heard about the FamMedPAC several years ago as a medical student attending the AAFP conference, I was highly skeptical. I lament the fact that lobbying and fundraising play such a large role in policymaking and elections in our government and am frustrated by the ways that the most vulnerable members of society are often left out of this process. The irony is not lost on me that one of my major efforts as the Resident Member of the AAFP Board of Directors ended up being to work with the PAC to create the student/resident seat and now serve on its Board! My experience has been illuminating and I have learned a lot about the political process.

While my feelings about PAC's have not changed, I have deepened my understanding of the role that FamMedPAC in particular plays in making positive change in our healthcare system and this has led me to appreciate it more. As the saying goes, "if you aren't at the table, you're on the menu." The FamMedPAC enables AAFP to be at the table for key conversations and create partnerships with legislators who are moving policies forward from the AAFP agenda.

Additionally, Ballast Research, an independent research firm in Washington D.C. recognized the AAFP as one of the most effective, influential, and impactful advocacy organizations in Washington after an extensive review process. This positive reputation for being a trustworthy and bipartisan group has enabled the AAFP to advance advocacy efforts that improve the healthcare system for patients and physicians alike.

One of the most challenging issues the FamMedPAC faces is to determine if and how to partner with legislators who align with the AAFP on some issues but are in opposition to the AAFP's agenda on other issues, particularly controversial ones. Politicians may be helpful to the AAFP on less "exciting" issues of healthcare financing and payment reform, while at the same time supporting policies that the AAFP disagrees with on controversial social issues such as gun regulation. It has been a great learning experience seeing how the FamMedPAC weighs out these decisions to better advocate on the behalf of Family Physicians.

I encourage anyone with an interest in politics and policymaking to consider this position. It is an exciting opportunity to be a part of these decision processes, and our voices are needed in the room. Any time that I have offered my opinion it has been taken seriously, as the PAC leadership truly wants to involve students and residents more in the process. Due to COVID-19, some of the PAC's work has been remote or deferred over the past few months making it challenging for me to truly establish a structure and routine for reporting back on the PAC's work to the students and residents of the AAFP. The first person selected to formally hold this role will have a big opportunity to create transparency and communication channels moving forward. Please contact me with any questions about the role that you have, and please consider applying!

Note: This report was prepared by the resident or student representative(s) listed and includes their account(s) of the business conducted during their term. This is not an official record of business proceedings from the AAFP or any other entity. To find out more about the business of the AAFP, its congresses, commissions, and current policies visit aafp.org.