



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

September 29, 2011

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee
on Deficit Reduction
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee
on Deficit Reduction
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Hensarling, Chairwoman Murray, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), which represents the nation's 26 colleges of osteopathic medicine, offering the doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) degree at 34 locations in 25 states, **we respectfully urge you to explore fiscally responsible ways to sustain funding for graduate medical education (GME) and oppose any cuts to this vital funding.**

AACOM recognizes the unique opportunity presented by the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to identify and explore areas to address the challenges of the deficit. However, we ask that you seriously consider the importance of physician training, including training of primary care physicians, for patient care and our health care system in order to help meet the nation's growing health care demands. Our member institutions train large numbers of primary care physicians who ultimately practice in rural and underserved areas, treating patients most in need of a well-trained physician workforce.

As you know, Medicare provides the principal funding for the training of medical residents. Reducing this funding in any way will have a detrimental impact on hospitals with teaching programs for physician residents and on those who rely on them for care. These programs currently receive approximately \$9.5 billion annually, which is used to fund an insufficient number of residency slots each year. Cutting funding for GME programs would result in still fewer future physicians being trained, and as a result, fewer patients being treated. Evidence shows that because residents often begin their medical careers in a geographical location near where they trained, fewer local physician residents could reduce the already small supply of primary care physicians in those areas.

Today, more than 19,000 students are enrolled in osteopathic medical schools. Nearly one in five U.S. medical students is training to be an osteopathic physician. It is important to note that many current osteopathic medical students will pursue careers in primary care and many will practice in rural and underserved areas; the areas that already face

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shortages of primary care providers. The number of osteopathic medical school graduates is growing and is expected to continue to rise in response to physician workforce shortages that exist and are projected to increase over the next five to fifteen years. However, without appropriate GME funding, this growth will be stifled with serious implications for access to health care for your constituents.

As the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction continues its work, AACOM looks forward to collaborating with you to find a fiscally responsible path towards reducing our nation's deficit as well as finding common ground on exploring more efficient use of the funds that are available. AACOM believes decreasing funding for osteopathic physician training would jeopardize the nation's health and would further exacerbate the impending physician workforce. AACOM also believes that the GME program should evolve to reflect the future needs of the health care system by prioritizing primary care, training physicians in the non-hospital sites where they will be providing care and embracing innovative training, like the Teaching Health Center Program.

As you continue to move forward in working toward deficit reduction, please do not hesitate to contact me if AACOM can be of assistance in providing you with information on this issue. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SC Shannon".

Stephen C. Shannon, DO, MPH
President and CEO

cc: The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen