

July 25, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senate and HELP Leadership:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), which represents the administrations, faculty, and students of the nation's 26 colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs) at 34 locations in 25 states, I am writing to express opposition to H.R. 1216, which was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on May 25, 2011.

As you know, H.R. 1216 would convert the mandatory appropriations for the Teaching Health Center (THC) program established by Section 5508 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) into an authorization subject to the annual appropriations process. The ACA appropriated \$230 million over 2011-15 to the THC program to operate graduate medical education (GME) programs in community-based settings.

As designed, the THC program is uniquely positioned to address primary care training for underserved populations. AACOM can speak directly to the need for a program of this nature, as many of our members are educating osteopathic medical students in rural and underserved areas, and as many of our students ultimately practice primary care. It is the first GME program of its kind to move residency training out of hospital-based GME programs. If successful, this program will help to shift GME training to community-based care settings, emphasizing primary care and prevention.

To fully evaluate the success of this program, the THCs must have sufficient and sustainable funding as was guaranteed under the ACA. Earlier this year, the Department of Health and Human Services announced the first 11 THCs to receive funding. These programs are scheduled to begin training residents later this year; H.R. 1216 would jeopardize funding for these programs and nullify the contracts between them and the Health Resources and Services Administration.

However, our concerns extend beyond the potential loss of funds for these programs. The hospital-based GME program has been so successful because it has predictable funding each year. H.R. 1216 would remove this consistent funding for new community-based programs at a time it is most needed and would serve as a disincentive for future applicants. The THC program was expected to grow in

future years as community-based sites invested in the infrastructure needed to run training programs. To participate, potential THCs would have to first secure commitments from future faculty, seek and secure accreditation, secure the support of key community stakeholders, and recruit medical students for future residency positions. Without predictable funding, there would be no incentive to make these investments.

We urge you to consider the necessity for community-based training programs like the THC Program. Therefore, we respectfully request that you oppose H.R. 1216. This legislation has the potential to move our health care system backward at a time when we must innovate to meet the health care needs of our growing and aging population.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue. We look forward to working together to advance policies to ensure a quality and well-trained physician workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "SC Shannon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Stephen C. Shannon, D.O., M.P.H.
President and CEO