



## Purpose

Federally-funded graduate medical education (GME) programs frequently exclude or impose burdensome requirements on Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DOs). These practices exacerbate the workforce shortage by limiting access to licensed DO physicians. The *FAIR Act* is needed to ensure DOs have equal access to Medicare-funded residency programs and the nation is leveraging all available physicians to support access to healthcare.

## Background

DO and MD requirements are parallel, both leading to unrestricted physician licenses. DOs attend Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine and take the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States (COMLEX-USA) for state licensure and acceptance to residency programs. COMLEX-USA is equivalent to the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) taken by allopathic students (MDs).

In 2020, residency training for physicians was consolidated under a single accreditor. Graduating DO and MD seniors now enter a "single match" and compete for acceptance into residency programs where they will train for the next three to seven years, depending on medical specialty. Residency training is required for licensure, and **Medicare accounts for 71% of all GME funding**.

DO students are excluded entirely from many federally-funded residencies. **32% of residency program directors report never interviewing DOs (7%) or seldom interviewing DOs (25%)**. These exclusions restrict the specialty choices of osteopathic medical students as reflected in the decline of DOs who match to their preferred surgical specialties since single accreditation.

DO students also face unjustified barriers to residency not faced by their MD colleagues. **Over half (56%) of GME programs considering DOs mandate the USMLE**. DOs incur significant financial costs (**over \$6 million a year**) and emotional hardships to prepare for an additional examination that is not designed for the osteopathic profession or necessary for licensure. **The American Medical Association promotes equality in GME for DOs and MDs, including equal acceptance of the COMLEX-USA and USMLE at all U.S. residency programs.**

DOs play a critical role in addressing the physician workforce shortage. In 2023, **55.9% of DO seniors went into primary care**. Moreover, **41% of graduating 2020-2021 osteopathic medical students plan to practice in a medically underserved or health shortage area; of those, 49% plan to practice in a rural community**. More than **73% of DOs practice in the state where they do residency training, so barriers impact rural and primary care access**. Taxpayer funded GME programs should ensure fair consideration of residency applications from DOs and MDs.

## Impact

The *FAIR Act* requires Medicare-funded GME programs, as a condition of participation, to report annually on the number of osteopathic and allopathic applicants and accepted residents and affirm that COMLEX-USA and USMLE will be equally accepted if an exam score is required. Championed by Reps. Harshbarger (R-TN), Pingree (D-ME) Graves (R-MO) and Golden (D-ME), H.R. 751 will help strengthen the physician pipeline, support equitable treatment of DOs and increase access to high-quality, patient-centered healthcare.

### AACOM Recommends

Introduce a Senate companion bill to the *FAIR Act* (H.R. 751) and cosponsor and pass the legislation to ensure that Medicare-funded GME programs equitably accept and assess osteopathic graduates.

### About AACOM

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) leads and advocates for osteopathic medical education to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 to support the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 41 colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs) – educating more than 35,000 future physicians, 25 percent of all US medical students – at 65 medical school campuses, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at U.S. medical centers, hospitals, clinics and health systems. **For more information, please contact David Bergman, Vice President of Government Relations, [dbergman@aacom.org](mailto:dbergman@aacom.org) (301) 968-4174.**