MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the New Jersey State Senate  
Members of the New Jersey General Assembly

FROM: Stephen C. Shannon, DO, MPH  
President and CEO  
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM)

SUBJECT: New Jersey Medical and Health Sciences Education Restructuring Act

DATE: June 26, 2012

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), I am writing in support of the position of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) to maintain as a unit all schools under its infrastructure, to include the School of Osteopathic Medicine, if relocated. However, since this is not being proposed, we urge support of S-2063 as amended by the Senate on June 21, 2012 and A-3102 as amended by the Assembly Budget Committee on June 25, 2012, inclusive of language that protects: the distinct osteopathic identity of the School of Osteopathic Medicine; the delivery of a complete mission of undergraduate and graduate medical education, research and patient care; resourcing adequate to continue this complete mission; and fulfillment of the requirements for the continued accreditation of the school.

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) represents the administrations, faculty, and students of the nation’s osteopathic colleges which offer the doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) degree. There are 29 colleges of osteopathic medicine at 37 locations in 28 states. Currently over 20,000 medical students—1 in 5 students at a U.S. medical school—are studying at an osteopathic medical school.

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey – School of Osteopathic Medicine (UMDNJ-SOM) is the state’s only college of osteopathic medicine. With approximately 2,000 graduates and over 600 full-time, part-time, and volunteer faculty, UMDNJ-SOM is dedicated to providing excellence in medical education, research, and health care for New Jersey and the nation. It has one of the largest graduate medical education (GME) programs of all osteopathic medical schools across the country with more than 350 interns, residents, and fellows. UMDNJ-SOM also provides enormous opportunity for New Jersey residents to pursue a career in osteopathic medicine – for the 160 students
currently admitted to the class of August 2012, 79 percent are New Jersey residents, with 18 percent from South Jersey.

UMDNJ-SOM is a leader in patient care - 250,000 patients treated per year by The University Doctors- - UMDNJ-SOM’s faculty practice plan. It is also a leader in producing more primary care physicians to address primary care workforce shortages. Of the nearly 2,000 graduates of UMDNJ-SOM, half practice in the state, of which about 50 percent deliver primary care. For 11 percent of UMDNJ-SOM alumni, at least half of their practice hours are completed in medically underserved communities. More than half of UMDNJ-SOM’s 2012 graduates entered primary care residencies.

Moreover, UMDNJ-SOM is a renowned research institution, bringing $13 million in research and extramural funding into the state. The NJ Institute for Successful Aging at the UMDNJ-SOM is ranked among the best U.S. medical schools for geriatric medical education by U.S. News and World Report and has been among the top 20 schools for 11 consecutive years. Furthermore, the Child Abuse Research Education and Service (CARES) Institute at UMDNJ-SOM is a national leader in developing comprehensive diagnostic and treatment programs to address both the medical and mental health needs of children experiencing abuse. The federal government has recognized the CARES treatment program as the national model for detecting and treating child victims of sexual abuse and their families.

AACOM has notable concerns with the potential restructuring and relocation of UMDNJ-SOM to Rowan University, which could have a significant impact on physician training and patient care. UMDNJ-SOM has in place a solid infrastructure to provide a successful spectrum of education, research, and clinical patient care. Currently Rowan University does not have the infrastructure necessary to support UMDNJ-SOM’s mission and services. Therefore, in order for UMDNJ-SOM to continue its robust research and effective patient care, there must be available the appropriate resources and infrastructure, including: appropriate technology capabilities and systems; access to and maintenance of core research facilities; extensive medical libraries (including electronic collections); specialized legal services, a clinical research organization and structure; a clinical care structure committed to providing quality care and teaching-- in which resources for data and financial systems, electronic medical records systems, and other necessary infrastructure are in place. In comparison to the UMDNJ system, Rowan University does not have an infrastructure in place to support vigorous research programs, which could result in the potential loss of federal funding that is critical to the UMDNJ-SOM research mission and the improvement of patient care in New Jersey and throughout the nation.

UMDNJ-SOM is a strong leader in interdisciplinary collaboration to provide quality patient care through integration with five other health professions schools of UMDNJ, which include the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the School of Nursing, the School of Health Related Professions, the School of Public Health, and the New Jersey Dental School. Prioritizing this model of care becomes even more critical as the health care system moves toward team-based care. Due to the lack of infrastructure at Rowan University to support this type of collaboration, this comprehensive system will be eliminated, therefore impacting training and patient care. AACOM strongly supports interprofessional collaboration and the increased development of team-based learning experiences to support quality patient- and community-centered health care. AACOM believes that this type of heath care model is necessary in the evolving and complex health care system of the 21st century.
UMDNJ-SOM has one of the largest GME programs that can be found in all U.S. osteopathic medical schools. It is a major source of primary care physicians for the state of New Jersey. As mentioned above, of the nearly 2,000 graduates of UMDNJ-SOM, half practice in the state, of which about 50 percent deliver primary care. Over the past five years, the school has increased its number of medical students by 50 percent and also expanded its GME programs by building a statewide network of affiliated hospitals that provide clinical training sites. In osteopathic medical education, GME is sponsored and accredited through Osteopathic Postdoctoral Training Institutions (OPTIs), which are consortia that are comprised of an osteopathic medical school and the hospitals in which its residents are placed. The UMDNJ-SOM OPTI includes seven hospital systems that span the state of New Jersey. This statewide network of OPTI partners is vital to UMDNJ-SOM’s mission of educating physicians from New Jersey to serve the state of New Jersey. To continue the education of the growing number of undergraduate and graduate trainees who become physicians and who will meet patient needs in New Jersey, as well as expand training opportunities, it remains critical that the SOM maintain control of its undergraduate and graduate medical education.

Furthermore, AACOM has concerns with any changes which could affect UMDNJ-SOMs accreditation; any change in governance will need to be approved by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA), the accrediting body for colleges of osteopathic medicine. The change in structure due to the move to Rowan University could greatly impact SOM’s governance of resources in multiple areas, which would be subject to oversight and approval by COCA. These areas include, but are not limited to, faculty, clinical affiliations, research infrastructure, and overall ability to carry out its mission. Also of note, Rowan University is in the process of establishing a Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) accredited allopathic (MD) school, Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, which has its own resource requirements related to this process. Because each school is required to consider accreditation activities of the other when making its own accreditation determinations, AACOM urges strong assurances that this alignment will not have a negative impact on UMDNJ-SOM’s accreditation requirements. Given the complex issues related to the accreditation and operation of a medical school, AACOM has serious concerns with the lack of a detailed financial plan in consideration of a change of this magnitude; therefore, AACOM urges a detailed financial assessment and strategic plan prior to implementation.

The synergy and partnership of UMDNJ and UMDNJ-SOM have elevated the mission and goals of medical education, research, and health care in the state of New Jersey. This partnership has resulted in increasing quality patient care; producing a high level of primary care physicians in New Jersey; furthering robust research to benefit medicine; and promoting interdisciplinary patient-centered care.

Again, on behalf of AACOM, I urge that UMDNJ-SOM remain with the other schools of UMDNJ as they are relocated to Rutgers University. However, since this is not being proposed, we urge support of S-2063 as amended by the Senate on June 21, 2012 and A-3102 as amended by the Assembly Budget Committee on June 25, 2012, inclusive of language that protects: the distinct osteopathic identity of the School of Osteopathic Medicine; the delivery of a complete mission of undergraduate and graduate medical education, research and patient care; resourcing adequate to continue this complete mission; and fulfillment of the requirements for the continued accreditation of the school. I thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me directly if you need any additional information.