



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

December 19, 2016

The Honorable Michael R. Pence
Vice President-Elect
Presidential Transition Headquarters
1800 F Street, NW
Room G117
Washington, DC 20270-0117

Dear Vice President-Elect Pence:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), I write to request that national higher education policies that strongly support osteopathic medical education and the future physician workforce be thoroughly considered during and beyond the Administration's transition.

AACOM represents the 33 colleges of osteopathic medical schools in the United States. These colleges are accredited to deliver instruction at 48 teaching locations in 31 states. Six of the colleges are public and 27 are private institutions. In the 2015-2016 academic year, these colleges educated over 26,100 the training of physicians—more than 20 percent of all U.S. medical students.

As osteopathic medical schools continue to grow in number, which significantly impacts the nation's health care and medical education systems, AACOM looks forward to working with the incoming Administration to promote robust health care policies that foster osteopathic medical education and the training of osteopathic physicians.

As you know, the U.S. health care system faces numerous challenges: ongoing transformation, a rapidly evolving and diverse patient population, and a physician workforce shortage that is projected to worsen over the coming years. A majority of students entering medical school have already amassed high debt from their undergraduate education. At the same time, as students graduate with burgeoning debt loads, the nation faces a critical physician workforce shortage, particularly in rural and urban underserved areas. These debt loads are further exacerbated by federal policies that underserve medical and other health professions students. AACOM's annual survey found that 33 percent of osteopathic medical school graduates have expressed their intent to practice in primary care. Primary care physicians are vital, especially in health professional shortage areas, as they play a key role as the first line of contact in providing essential health care across the nation. However, as you know, existing restrictions for medical students in federal financial aid policies do not align with the urgency of this imminent reality.

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Therefore, we request that graduate education priorities of the incoming Administration champion the sustainment, expansion, and creation of policies that address the need for federal financial aid for medical students in support of the completion of their training to become licensed physicians. We support the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), which provides a key opportunity to address policies that will help alleviate the significant financial burdens of these students in training.

With the anticipated reauthorization of the HEA and as the Trump Administration continues to build upon its higher education policy platform, we ask that the following be supported:

- Address regulatory burdens which negatively impact our educational institutions, such as the state authorization and gainful employment regulations.
- Continued investment of current federal loan repayment and forgiveness programs.
- Preservation of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, which encourages physicians, health care, and other professionals to work full-time in public service.
- Lowering interest rate caps for medical and other health professions students established by the *Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act of 2013*.
- Preservation of the current structure and eligibility of the GradPLUS Loan Program.
- Continuation of the Federal Perkins Loan Program for graduate and professional students, and any changes to this program should be made with full consideration of factors unique to medical education.
- Support for the *Foreign Medical School Accountability Fairness Act of 2015*, which would hold all foreign medical schools accountable to the same standards.

AACOM looks forward to working with the new Administration to work together to build an education system that will enable current osteopathic medical students and future osteopathic physicians to provide the necessary health care to our nation's citizens. If you have any questions or wish to discuss these matters further, please contact Pamela Murphy, Senior Vice President of Government Relations, at pmurphy@aacom.org or (301) 908-2137.

Respectfully,

Stephen C. Shannon, DO, MPH
President and CEO