In the image, there is a letter addressed to The Honorable Patty Murray and The Honorable Richard Burr, Chair and Ranking Member, respectively, of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in the United States Senate. The letter is dated July 7, 2021, and is written on behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM). The text highlights the role of osteopathic medicine in the healthcare system and the urgent needs the osteopathic community seeks to address, including permanent eligibility for designated health professions students to administer vaccinations under supervision in the event of any future Public Health Emergency (PHE), expansion of the future physician workforce through the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) Program, Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) and other physician training programs, and student loan debt and economic relief during PHEs, including student loan debt repayment suspension and student loan forgiveness for frontline workers.

Permanent Eligibility for Health Professions Student Vaccinators

Students Assist America (SAA), an interprofessional initiative of 12 associations spearheaded by AACOM, successfully advocated for a Seventh Amendment to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act authorizing students from designated health professions to administer COVID-19 vaccinations. The amendment opened the door for almost one million skilled medical, nursing, pharmacy, dental, veterinary, physician assistant, optometry and other health professions students to administer COVID-19 vaccines with supervision.

AACOM applauds the Biden Administration for this important change and strongly urges Congress to pass the Student Assisted Vaccination Effort (SAVE) Act (S. 2114). Introduced by Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Susan Collins (R-ME), the SAVE Act would permanently authorize...
health professions students to administer vaccinations and alleviate burdens on the healthcare workforce during future PHEs.

Expansion of the Future Physician Workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a robust physician workforce is essential to meet our nation’s growing healthcare needs, especially in rural and underserved areas. To help address the physician shortage and prepare for future public health emergencies, AACOM urges Congress to expand the future physician workforce through:

- Permanent and increased funding for the THCGME Program through the Doctors of Community Act (S. 1958/H.R.3671) to expand the primary care physician workforce
- Removal of the statutory cap on Medicare-supported GME slots and increased residencies in rural and underserved areas through the Rural Physician Workforce Production Act of 2021 (S. 1893)
- Increased Medicare-supported GME positions through the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (S. 834/H.R. 2256)
- Sustained funding for loan repayment and forgiveness programs, such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program and National Health Service Corps (NHSC), which incentivize physicians to practice in rural and medically underserved areas

Student Loan Debt and Economic Relief

During public health emergencies, healthcare professionals risk their lives daily for the health of communities across the nation. Supporting our country’s physicians and medical students by reducing their outstanding education debt during PHEs is certainly in the nation’s interest. AACOM urges Congress to adopt sustainable solutions to preserve and enhance programs that address student debt and ease the financial burden placed on healthcare workers, including osteopathic medical school graduates, as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and future public health crises:

- Student loan debt relief for frontline healthcare workers responding to public health emergencies through the Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act (H.R. 2418)
- Suspension of student loan payments and interest during public health emergencies, in which suspended monthly payments would count toward satisfying PSLF Program requirements

AACOM appreciates your consideration of these proposals and looks forward to continuing our work with you. For additional information, please contact David Bergman, JD, Vice President of Government Relations, at dbergman@aacom.org.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Cain, DO, FACOI, FAODME
President and CEO