

December 14, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The undersigned organizations, representing the nation's physicians and medical education programs, request your support for Senate Amendment 2909 offered to the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" (H.R. 3590). This important amendment would increase the number of graduate medical education positions by 15 percent.

As a result of provisions included in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, our nation's physician training capacity has been static since 1997. The BBA established limitations on the number of residency training positions, with little opportunity for increasing capacity. There is now mounting evidence that our nation faces a significant shortage of physicians in primary care, general surgery, as well as many specialties.

Our population is both increasing and aging. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the population will exceed 350 million people by 2025 and the number of Medicare beneficiaries will almost double during this same time period. Additionally, the nation's physician workforce resembles the broader society. Presently, more than one-third of all practicing physicians are over the age of 55, meaning that they are likely to retire in the next two decades. These events will exacerbate the current acknowledged physician shortage.

The Senate is striving to approve legislation that would expand health care coverage to millions of individuals presently uninsured and improve the quality of coverage for millions more. Unfortunately, coverage does not equal access. We must educate and train a cadre of physicians capable of meeting the health care needs of our growing and aging population, with priority given to those specialties and subspecialties--including primary care and general surgery-- that are facing shortages and are most needed.

Senate Amendment 2909 is a necessary step towards ensuring the future physician workforce. We urge you to signify your support by becoming a cosponsor and by supporting the amendment when considered by the Senate.

Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin
American College of Physicians
American College of Surgeons
American Medical Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Medical Group Management Association