

February 2019

REAUTHORIZE AND FUND TEACHING HEALTH CENTERS

RECOMMENDATION:

Please cosponsor S. 304, the *Training the Next Generation of Primary Care Doctors Act of 2019*, introduced by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME), Jon Tester (D-MT), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Doug Jones (D-AL), John Boozman (R-AR), Joe Manchin (D-WV), and Kamala Harris (D-CA)

Background:

The Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program, currently administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), provides funding to support an increase in primary care medical and dental residents training in community-based settings across the country. Teaching Health Centers (THCs) are community-based primary care training programs committed to preparing physicians to meet the community's health needs.ⁱ By moving training into the community, THCs are on the leading edge of innovative educational programming dedicated to ensuring a sufficient supply of primary care physicians.

The THCGME Program, established in 2010 and reauthorized in 2015 and 2018 has been, by any measure, an overwhelming success. In the 2017-2018 academic year, the program supported the training of 732 residents in 57 primary care residency programs, across 24 states. Since 2011, the program has supported the training of over 630 new primary care physicians and dentists that have graduated and entered the workforce. Importantly, physicians trained in teaching health center programs are more likely to practice in underserved communities, increasing access to care for the country's most vulnerable patient populations.

The value of primary care is well documented. In fact, individuals who have a continuous relationship with a primary care physician are more likely to be healthier and use fewer health care resources. Research shows that our nation faces a primary care physician workforce shortage. This program is directly addressing the serious shortage of primary care physicians. The THCGME Program has proven its ability to efficiently increase the number of primary care physicians trained. Research demonstrates that family physicians usually practice within 100 miles of their residency program, so decentralized training can be expected to help remedy the uneven distribution of physicians.ⁱⁱ

Action is Needed Now:

This highly successful and impactful program is set to expire on September 30, 2019 unless Congress takes action to reauthorize and fund it. The legislation not only reauthorizes the program, but also provides enhanced funding and a pathway for increasing the number of residents trained. Most important, the legislation will continue to build the primary care physician pipeline necessary to reduce costs, improve patient care, and support underserved rural and urban communities.

This is an important and productive program; it should be funded sustainably. Congress should provide for the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program this year to prevent a disruption in the pipeline of primary care physician production.

ⁱ Teaching Health Centers: A New Way Forward in Medical Education. GW University Medical Education Futures Study. 2011-2012.

ⁱⁱ Migration After Family Medicine Residency: 56% of Graduates Practice Within 100 Miles of Training. Fagan EB, Finnegan SC, et al. *Am Fam Physician*. 2013 Nov 15;88(10):704. <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2013/1115/p704.html#>. Accessed July 15, 2014.