



To: CAFM Members
From: Nina DeJonghe, MPP
Director of Government Relations

Re: Government Relations Report
Date: February 18, 2026

Happening now in Washington, D.C.

Both the House and Senate are in recess this week, though negotiations continue on FY 2026 funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), currently the only agency in a shutdown. Resolving DHS funding remains Congress's top priority.

President Trump will deliver his State of the Union address on February 24, 2026, where health care affordability is expected to be a central theme. The administration is also preparing to release its FY 2027 budget request, which may be delayed into March. Meanwhile, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced leadership changes last week, including the departure of the Deputy Secretary/Acting CDC Director, with further impacts still emerging. Congress returns next week, with health policy hearings expected to resume quickly.

Next Week in Congress

On Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. ET, the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing titled "Advancing the Next Generation of America's Health Care Workforce." The hearing will examine innovative approaches to training the nation's health care workforce, with a focus on serving rural and underserved communities and leveraging technology to promote healthier living.

FY 2027 Appropriations

CAFAM has started the process of advocating for our FY 2027 priorities especially around PCTE and AHRQ funding. The fiscal year ends on September 30th, 2026.

HELP Hearing Re NIH

On February 10th, NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya testified during a Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee [hearing](#) entitled "Modernizing the NIH: Faster Discoveries, More Cures." Democrats criticized Dr. Bhattacharya and the Trump Administration for NIH research cuts and specifically proposed terminations of clinical trials and cutting

research by using multi-year funding. Republicans focused their questions on the need to modernize NIH operations and increase transparency.

HELP Report

HELP Committee Ranking Minority Senator Bernie Sanders issued a report [here](#) that analyzes NIH data and draws from interviews with federal scientists, researchers, and workers. It finds that NIH has terminated or frozen at least \$561 million in research on four of the leading causes of death in America, cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, and diabetes. The report finds the Trump administration is using a list of banned words to decide which research gets funded, including apartheid, adolescent, COVID, climate change, inequity and natural disasters.

Rep. Taylor Rural Reclassification Bill

On February 5th, Representatives Dave Taylor (R-OH) and Carole Miller (R-WVA) introduced the [Defend Rural Health Act](#). The bill would require urban hospitals to meet stricter criteria to reclassify as a rural hospital. Additionally, this bill would prohibit dual reclassifications through the Medicare Geographic Classification Review Board, which is the mechanism through which urban hospitals are currently able to retain their higher Medicare urban wage index payments while simultaneously claiming to be rural for other benefits.

Rep. Blackburn Health Care Workforce Real-Time Data Dashboard Act

CAFM is now supporting [S. 3038](#), The Health Care Workforce Real-Time Data Dashboard Act, introduced by Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN). The bill would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and maintain a real-time data dashboard for graduate medical education (GME) residency training position participants with a focus on rural areas. CAFM met two weeks ago with staff to discuss revisions around the dashboard.

Senate Aging Hearing

The Senate Special Committee on Aging convened a [hearing](#) entitled, "The Doctor is Out: How Washington's Rules Drove Physicians Out of Medicine on February 11th, 2026. Notable witnesses were Dr. Alma Littles, a family medicine physician who is the Dean and Chief Academic Officer at the Florida State University College of Medicine and Dr. Lee Gross, a family practitioner who runs Epiphany Healthcare. Dr. Littles focused on their curriculum, on issues such as mental health and suicide prevention, and the need to limit regulations which harm the ability to practice. Dr. Gross focused on the reasons he moved from a fee for service practice to a direct primary care subscription model. Notable questions and answers are below.

- Several witnesses talked about the need to include practice management modules such as billing, contract development, and administration as part of physician training.
- Several witnesses talked about the lack of primary care availability in rural areas and the direct correlation to reimbursement.
- Senator Raphael Warnock (D-GA) asked specifically about workforce and mentioned that he is a bill lead on the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2025. A

witness responded that reimbursement is the real problem. Legislation should include payment incentives to promote primary care in rural areas.

- Another witness also talked about the need for loan repayment.

ACA Subsidies

Efforts to come to consensus on the enhanced Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies that expired in December of 2025 have lost momentum. Senator Bernie Moreno (R-OH) recently offered a one-year extension which he termed the last Republican offer and Senate Democrats uniformly opposed the proposal. Senator Moreno and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced a two-year extension late last year. Reports said that Hyde Amendment language on abortion led to the impasse.

REGULATORY ACTIVITY

NIH Framework

At the end of 2025, the NIH released a framework for [Engaging the Public as Partners in Clinical Research](#), developed by the NExTRAC ENGAGE Working Group in collaboration with the NIH. [NIH Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya publicly endorsed the framework](#), marking a significant step toward embedding patient and community partnership into the nation's clinical research enterprise.

AHRQ Webinar on Building the Primary Care Workforce

The next AHRQ National Center for Excellence in Primary Care Research webinar, “Building the Primary Care Research Workforce: Fellowships in Action”, is scheduled for February 26th. The webinar will provide an overview of fellowships in primary care research and introduce a new AHRQ resource with data about how to participate and the benefits from both Fellows and Fellowship directors. [Registration](#) is available here.

Moderator:

Kevin Grumbach, MD (University of California, San Francisco)

Panelists:

- David Rabago, MD (Penn State College of Medicine) – NIH Institutional National Research Service Award (T32) Fellowship Director
- Roberta Chardulo-Reina, PhD (Penn State Health) – T32 Current Fellow
- Yalda Jabbarpour, MD (The Robert Graham Center)
- Joshua Smith, MD, MPH (Georgetown University) – The Robert Graham Center Current Fellow
- Hunter Holt, MD (University of Illinois Chicago) – National Clinician Scholars Program; Former UCSF Fellow

Medical Groups Comment on ICE

Multiple physicians and nurses issued statements about recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) efforts in Minnesota, warning it is deterring immigrant communities from seeking medical care and impacting health care workers. The American Medical Association issued a [statement](#) on January 26th. The American Nurses Association released a [statement](#) on January 24th. Minnesota physicians including The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, the Minnesota section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Minnesota Medical Association joined in a [press conference](#) to indicate their concern about access to health care in the state.

Education Department Releases Draft Rules on OBBBA Student Loan Provisions

On January 30th, the Department of Education released [draft regulations](#) to implement many of the student loan provisions in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). The draft rules include new federal loan limits, revised repayment plans, and legacy provisions for borrowers with pre-OBBBA federal loans. Under the notice of negotiated rulemaking, stakeholders will have 30 days to submit public comments. The draft regulations provide language developed in November 2025 by the Reimagining and Improving Student Education negotiated rulemaking committee, which was convened to develop regulations implementing the student loan provisions.

NIH Incentivizes Replication Studies, Reproducibility

On January 29th, the NIH launched a new [website](#) entitled Strengthening Replication and Reproducibility of NIH-funded Research. The goals of the plan according to NIH are:

- *Driving Effective NIH Replication and Reproducibility Efforts* by making NIH research findings quickly available to the public and supporting independent replication research to generate best practices and lessons learned.
- *Incentivizing Replication and Reproducibility Sciences Across the Research Enterprise:* NIH will work with the scientific community to identify innovative approaches that reinforce and incentivize replication and reproducibility across the research enterprise.
- *Institutionalizing Replication and Reproducibility as a Scientific Discipline:* NIH will invest in building and sustaining critical infrastructure to drive and embed replication and reproducibility throughout biomedical research.

NIH's [proposed strategy](#), released in August, started the process around replication and reproducibility.

OTHER

The AAMC Releases Publication on Compensation Equity Resources

On January 29th, The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) released a new [publication](#) entitled *A Shared Commitment to Fair Pay: Recommendations for Creating and Sustaining Compensation Equity in Academic Medicine*. The publication focuses on fair pay as a

key business practice and critical strategy for successful workforce recruitment and retention. It discusses how to recognize, reward, and compensate faculty more equitably by refining existing systems and processes. The AAMC hosted its first national Compensation Equity Summit to provide a forum for academic medical leaders to share concrete strategies for supporting fair pay. The summit's findings and conclusions were the basis for recommendations contained in the report. The report presents three key recommendation areas with actionable strategies any institution can use to start or enhance their compensation equity efforts. AAMC will also launch a three-part [webinar](#) as part of the publication.