

December 6, 2007

The Honorable Richard Burr
United States Senate
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burr:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), representing 124,000 internal medicine physicians, residents and medical students, I am writing to applaud your efforts to permanently restore the medical student loan deferment program, known as the "20/220 pathway" and expand the current economic hardship qualifications for medical residents. S. 2303 would reverse the provision in the "College Cost Reduction and Access Act" (H.R. 2669) that calls for the elimination of the 20/220 pathway. This pathway is the economic hardship deferment qualification criterion that most of the nation's medical residents rely upon to defer their student loan debts while completing residency training.

Without this deferment option, the majority of medical residents, who would have otherwise been able to defer repayment for up to three years time during their residency, would be forced to begin repayment immediately after the conclusion of their medical school training. Such a debt is a significant hardship throughout the loan repayment period, particularly during the three to seven years of training in residency programs. By permanently restoring this pathway and expanding the current economic hardship qualifications, your legislation will allow even more medical residents to benefit from this program.

ACP is concerned about the rising cost of medical education and resulting financial debt burden on medical students and physicians-in-training. High levels of debt serve as a deterrent to pursuing careers in primary care, working in underserved areas, or entering the medical profession altogether. Further complicating student debt repayment will likely only deter students from pursuing careers in medicine, particularly less remunerative specialties such as internal medicine and family medicine, which are already facing shortages. ACP applauds you for recognizing the critical importance of the medical student loan deferment program that so many of our nation's medical residents rely upon during their training. We look forward to working with you on a long term solution for continued loan deferment eligibility for medical residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David C. Dale". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David C. Dale, MD, FACP
President