

October 16, 2006

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2426 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Conyers:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), representing 120,000 internal medicine physicians and medical students, I want to thank you for introducing the "U.S. Physician Shortage Elimination Act." ACP is the largest medical specialty society and the second largest medical organization in the United States. We greatly appreciate your efforts to expand the number of primary care physicians in the United States, particularly in federally designated shortage areas. ACP is concerned about the decline in interest in careers in primary care specialties, including internal medicine. The number of medical students and residents choosing to pursue careers in general internal medicine are declining at alarming rates. Because the role of general internists and other primary care physicians is central to the provision of care to older adults and patients with chronic conditions, any shortage of these physicians will only aggravate the existing crises in health care.

ACP is concerned about the rising levels of indebtedness of medical students. Students with large debts are much more likely to be influenced by debt in their career choices. In fact, those students with debt that exceed \$150,000 are the least likely to select a primary care residency. ACP supports efforts to provide opportunities to students that would like to pursue careers in primary care. ACP is pleased that the legislation calls for the creation of a National Health Service Corps Medical School Scholarship Program that would provide funding for students from underprivileged areas and for those who desire to attend medical school and cannot afford to do so.

ACP is also pleased that this legislation includes grants to medical schools to increase capacity, develop curriculum and recruit, train and retain faculty. Because initial decisions about specialty choice are made during medical school, it is critical that the educational program in internal medicine and other primary care specialties be as robust as possible. These grants will assist medical schools in ensuring high quality medical education.

Finally, the College feels strongly that internal medicine residents need more exposure to ambulatory care settings including community health centers and physician offices. Therefore, ACP supports the legislation's provision of grants to community health centers for the purpose of increasing primary care capabilities through the construction, expansion or renovation of facilities. ACP is also pleased that the legislation calls for grants for the purpose of recruiting and retaining primary care staff, and the establishment of a multi-community physician mentoring program. It is critical that residents be

exposed to enthusiastic role models – at both faculty (academic and volunteer) and housestaff levels who are positive about their own careers in internal medicine and other primary care specialties.

ACP is concerned that there will not be an adequate supply of well-trained primary care physicians to meet the nation's growing health care needs. As the baby boom population ages and incidences of multiple chronic conditions rise, more general internists will be needed. Specific efforts must be made to ensure an adequate supply of general internists and to encourage entry into the field of internal medicine. The "U.S. Physician Shortage Elimination Act" is a great step toward addressing the looming crisis in internal medicine and other primary care specialties. ACP commends you for your leadership in introducing this legislation. We look forward to working with you and lawmakers from both political parties in getting this legislation enacted into law. Please contact Renee Zerehi, Manager, Health Policy at 202-261-4555 or [rzerehi@acponline.org](mailto:rzerehi@acponline.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lynne M. Kirk, M.D., FACP  
President