

March 16, 2007

The Honorable Bill Nelson
United States Senate
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am pleased to express our support for S.588, the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2007, to increase the Medicare caps on graduate medical education positions for States with a shortage of resident physicians. ACP is the largest medical specialty society in the United States, representing 120,000 doctors of internal medicine and medical students. ACP is concerned about the looming crisis in the supply of primary care physicians, particularly the pending undersupply of general internists and the potential impact on the health care of the United States population. This decline is occurring at exactly the same time when the evidence suggests that the need for primary care physicians, who can provide the coordination and management services needed to treat chronic illnesses for adults, will continue to rise.

ACP applauds your efforts to address the physician workforce crisis by calling for an increase in the number of Medicare-supported physician residency positions. Increasing the number of internal medicine residency positions is a great step in reversing the decline in the supply of general internists. ACP is especially pleased that S. 588 includes a provision that the Secretary of HHS take into consideration whether new resident positions will be in primary care, preventive medicine, or geriatrics programs.

Unless steps are taken now, there will not be enough general internists to take care of an aging population with growing incidences of chronic diseases. Increasing GME caps alone will not be effective in assuring an adequate supply of physicians, and specifically, general internists, without changes in reimbursement policies, student debt, and other factors that discourage physicians from going into primary care and encourage those who already are in practice to leave primary care. ACP commends you for your leadership in introducing this legislation. We look forward to working with you to advance the goals of S.588 and any other efforts to address the physician workforce crisis.

Sincerely,

Lynne M. Kirk, MD, FACP
President