



October 25, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chair
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chairwoman
Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Chairwoman Eshoo,

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I would like to express our strong support for the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act (H.R. 1667), legislation that addresses the behavioral health and well-being of physicians. We appreciate your acknowledgement of the need to bolster services to address the mental health needs of our nation's doctors, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and fight the stigma around seeking necessary treatment and support. Thank you for convening a legislative hearing on October 26th in the subcommittee entitled "Caring for America: Legislation to Support Patients, Caregivers, and Providers," which includes consideration of this legislation. I request that this letter be inserted into the official hearing record.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 161,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Internal medicine specialists treat many of the patients at greatest risk from COVID-19, including the elderly and patients with pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.

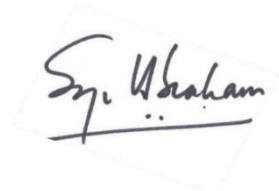
We know the current pandemic has added a tremendous level of strain on medical professionals, many of whom are experiencing personal hardships as they care for distressed patients and manage their own families and their own health. This legislation is a timely opportunity to respond to the mental health needs of our nation's frontline physicians. In a Primary Care Collaborative survey conducted in July of 2020, 45 percent of physicians surveyed reported that their ability to bounce back or adjust to adversity had become limited and 38 percent report being maxed out with mental exhaustion. America's physicians are at a critical breaking point that must be urgently addressed.

Mental health data show that physicians in the United States face higher incidents of suicide than almost any other profession. The 2018 Medscape National Physician Depression and Burnout Report showed 66 percent of male physicians and 58 percent of female physicians revealed they were experiencing burnout, depression, or both. The study also discussed that many of the professionals were not seeking help and had no plans to do so because of barriers such as stigma and the professional risks associated with disclosing their treatment activities to medical boards.

The Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act is an important proposal because it aims to prevent and reduce incidences of suicide, mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and long-term stress, sometimes referred to as “burnout.” Through grants, education, and awareness campaigns - the legislation will help reduce stigma and identify resources for health care clinicians seeking assistance. The legislation also supports research on health care professional mental and behavioral health, including the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Again, we strongly support the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act and thank you for your leadership in bringing this important legislation before the subcommittee. If you have any questions, please contact Jonni McCrann at (202) 261-4541 or at jmccrann@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George M. Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

George M. Abraham, MD, MPH, MACP, FIDSA
President