



September 19, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing in reference to the important work being done to finalize and pass the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2020. We urge you and your colleagues to make much-needed investments in federal health care programs and initiatives designed to maintain and expand primary care, ensure an adequate physician workforce, and promote public health, as outlined below. Please continue the bipartisan process in place to complete this bill and avoid a government shutdown prior to the October 1, 2019, start of fiscal year 2020. In addition, we urge you to allocate the highest possible amount of resources to the FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill to maintain and expand the progress made in recent years. We are particularly concerned that the relatively flat funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) outside of the welcome increase for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the Senate FY2020 (LHHS) Appropriations bill will lead to cuts and flat funding of many proven programs.

The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 159,000 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.

ACP has previously [engaged](#) with appropriators on the importance of funding key programs that support access to primary care as provided for under HHS. Specifically, ACP urges Congress to:

- **Fund Title VII, Section 747, Primary Care Training and Enhancement (PCTE) at \$71 million for fiscal year 2020:** The PCTE Program distributes educational grants for primary care physician students, medical residents, fellows, and faculty to enhance primary care provider recruitment.

While the College appreciates the \$10 million increase to the program in FY2018, ACP urges more funding because the Section 747 PCTE program is the only source of federal training dollars available for general internal medicine, general pediatrics, and family medicine. In order to maintain and expand the pipeline for individuals training in primary care, more resources are necessary than the \$48.924 million provided by both the House and Senate FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bills.

- **Fund the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) at \$460 million for fiscal year 2020:** We strongly believe that AHRQ's activities and related outcomes research provides incomparable and invaluable data that can be neither replicated nor replaced elsewhere in the federal government or the private sector. The College is dedicated to ensuring AHRQ's vital role in improving the quality of our nation's health and has consistently requested in written testimony over the years that the necessary resources be provided for its activities. AHRQ discontinued funding for the National Guidelines Clearinghouse due to a lack of funding. Restoring funding for the National Guidelines Clearinghouse is essential to facilitate evidence-based clinical practice. The \$358 million and \$256 million provided respectively in the House and Senate FY2020 Labor-HHS-Ed Appropriations bills should be increased.
- **Fund the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) at \$830 million for fiscal year 2020:** For FY2020, the NHSC's funding situation is particularly urgent and faces a funding cliff because its mandatory funding is set to expire. In FY2019, the NHSC received \$105 million in discretionary funding to expand and improve access to quality opioid and substance use disorder treatment in underserved areas, in addition to \$310 million in mandatory funds. The House-passed and Senate version of the FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill contain \$120 million and \$105 million respectively for the NHSC. The NHSC awards scholarships and loan repayment to health care professionals to help expand the country's primary care workforce and meet the health care needs of underserved communities across the country. In FY2018, with a field strength of over 10,900 primary care clinicians, NHSC members are providing culturally competent care to over 11.5 million patients at over 16,000 NHSC-approved health care sites in urban, rural, and frontier areas. Increasing resources would help expand NHSC's field strength helping to address the health professionals' workforce shortage and growing maldistribution.
- **Fund the Title X Family Planning Program at \$400 million for fiscal year 2020 and include language to remove barriers to care that interfere with the patient-physician relationship:** The Title X program serves four million patients, almost 90 percent female, who received clinical services provided by Title X clinics, including contraceptive services, cervical and breast-cancer screenings, pregnancy testing and counseling, testing and treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases and various patient education and referral services in [2017](#). Eighty-seven percent of these patients had incomes at or below 200 percent of federal poverty, and more than two-thirds were at or below the federal poverty line. For sixty-one percent of patients, Title X clinicians were women's only regular source of health care. Accordingly, ACP supports \$400 million for the program, the same amount as the House-passed FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill, rather than the \$286 million in the Senate version.

ACP also requests that you include bill text in the final FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill—the same or similar to the Family Planning provision of Title II, Health Resources and Services Administration of the House-passed FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill—that would prevent HHS implementation of the final Title X rule. The College opposes regulatory restrictions that would deny or result in discrimination in the awarding of federal funding to women’s health clinics that are qualified under existing federal law for the provision of evidence-based services including, but not limited to, provision of contraception, preventive-health screenings, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, vaccines, counseling, rehabilitation, and referrals. In our July 2018 [comment letter](#) on the proposed regulations, ACP made clear that it strongly opposed rule changes to Title X that would make it more difficult for patients seeking contraception and reproductive health-care services to find care. **ACP believes these changes will greatly harm the patient-physician relationship by dictating what physicians can or cannot say to their patients as a condition of receiving federal funding for the clinics in which they provide services. Regulatory policies that strike directly at the centrality of the patient-physician relationship do not support health and cannot be permitted to move forward.**

- **Fund Research on Prevention of Firearms-related Injuries and Deaths at \$50 million for Fiscal Year 2020:** As data-driven decision makers, ACP advocates for robust research about the causes and consequences of firearm violence and unintentional injuries and for strategies to reduce firearm-related injuries. ACP submitted a [statement](#) to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies that urged the committee to provide dedicated and increased federal funding for research on firearms violence in FY2020. The House-passed FY2020 LHHS Appropriations includes \$50 million total for this research, with \$25 million allocated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and \$25 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study firearms safety and gun violence prevention. Federally-funded research is needed on firearms-related violence and on intervention and prevention strategies to reduce injuries caused by firearms and ACP urges Congress to retain this funding level in its final FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill.
- **Fund the National Institutes of Health (NIH) at \$42.1 billion for fiscal year 2020:** The College greatly appreciates the \$42.1 billion for NIH in the Senate FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill, \$1 billion more than the House-passed version. ACP strongly supports the nation’s medical research agency mission of making important discoveries that treat and cure disease to improve health and save lives and that maintain the United States’ standing as the world leader in medical and biomedical research.
- **Fund the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at \$8.275 billion for fiscal year 2020:** ACP strongly supports the CDC’s mission to collaborate and create the expertise, information, and tools needed to protect patients’ health—through health promotion, prevention of disease, injury, and disability, and preparedness for new health threats. The College also supports the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) because the PPHF is crucial in supporting efforts to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases and other threats to the public health. Accordingly, ACP [supports](#) the funding level of the House-passed FY2020

LHHS Appropriations bill for the CDC and urges Congress to retain this funding level in its final FY2020 LHHS Appropriations bill.

In closing, we urge the Congress to act on these above-named policies, pass bipartisan appropriations legislation to both avoid a federal government shutdown and to extend and fund these important programs and to further expand access to vital primary care services for all Americans. The College is keenly aware of the fiscal pressures facing the Congress at this time but strongly believes the United States must invest robustly in workforce and delivery system initiatives that support primary care and the public health, including programs that have a proven track record of effectiveness but also those that demonstrate the kind of innovation we need in any high-performing health care system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. McLean". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" being the most prominent.

Robert M. McLean, MD, FACP
President

CC: Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Members, House Committee on Appropriations