



March 15, 2021

The Honorable Susan Wild
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David McKinley P.E.
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Wild, McKinley et al:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I want to express our strong support of the *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act*, legislation that addresses the behavioral health and well being of physicians. We appreciate your acknowledgement of the need to bolster the mental health needs of our nation's doctors, particularly during COVID-19 pandemic, and fight the stigma around seeking necessary treatment and support.

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 163,000 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. Therefore, the legislation's introduction 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 addressed urgently.

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 developing this important legislation to address the behavioral health needs of America’s physicians. If you have any questions, contact George Lyons at (202) 261-4531 or glyons@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline W. Fincher MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jacqueline W. Fincher, MD, MACP
President