



September 28, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. 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 Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I urge you to make the needed investments in vital federal programs and initiatives designed to maintain and expand primary care, and ask that Congress pass immediately the necessary legislation to avoid the primary-care funding cliff that these programs will face at the end of this month. The National Health Service Corps (NHSC), the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program and Community Health Centers (CHCs) all face expiration of mandatory funding on September 30, 2017. In addition, the College also urges adequate funding for the Primary Care Training and Enhancement (PCTE) program of Section 747 of Title VII that is only funded until December 8, 2017.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 152,000 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.

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC):

Since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the NHSC has awarded over \$1.5 billion in 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. With a field strength of 9,700 primary-care clinicians, NHSC members are providing culturally competent care to over 10 million patients at 16,000 NHSC-approved health care sites in urban, rural, and frontier areas. The programs under the NHSC have proven to make an impact in meeting the health care needs of the underserved and ACP would like to see them expanded. More than 60 percent of NHSC members continue to practice in Health Professional Shortage Areas ten years after service. The NHSC's funding situation will greatly hinder the

NHSC from administering its loan and scholarship programs—especially new applications—and negatively impact primary care providers serving in these communities.

Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME):

The United States is facing a growing shortage of physicians in key specialties, including primary care. The THCGME program provides funding to train medical residents in primary care, thereby increasing the overall number of primary care physicians. THCGME funding trains medical residents in primary care in community settings, including CHCs, with a focus on areas where there are health provider shortages. Over half (55 percent) of THCGME program training sites are in medically underserved areas. In the 2017-2018 academic year, THCGMEs are currently training 732 primary care residents in 57 programs across 24 states in Federally Qualified Health Centers, Rural Health Clinics, and Tribal health centers. Without funding, these programs will be at risk of not being able to train these medical residents.

Community Health Centers (CHC):

ACP supports adequate funding of community health centers, as a part of providing affordable coverage to all Americans. CHCs receive a combination of both discretionary and mandatory funding from the federal government, with 70 percent of that total funding at risk of expiring on September 30th. Over 1,400 CHCs serve patients all across the country in both rural and urban settings serving 24 million people each year. Loss of funding would be devastating, putting in jeopardy 2,800 health center sites, over 50,000 jobs and, most troubling, nine million patients could lose their access to healthcare services.

Title VII Health Professions Training in Primary Care and Training Enhancement (PCTE):

The PCTE Program distributes educational grants for programs designed to encourage students to enter primary care fields, support the training of primary care medical residents and fellows, and the careers of primary care medical faculty. The PCTE program trained 1,041 primary care residents and fellows in Academic Year 2015-2016 and 58 percent of this program's physician and physician trainees practiced in a medically underserved area. If funding is not sustained after December 8th for PCTE grants, these programs would have trouble continuing their training activities.

In conclusion, the College strongly believes the United States must invest robustly in workforce and delivery system initiatives that support primary care and the public health. The NHSC, THCGME, CHCs, and PCTE are all programs that not only have a proven track record of effectiveness but also demonstrate the kind of innovation we need in any high performing health care system. Accordingly, ACP requests that Congress pass legislation to fund these programs without further delay. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jack Ende, MD, MACP
President

CC: Members of the United States House of Representatives, United States Senate