

August 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer:

On behalf of the undersigned health care provider organizations, we are writing to ask for your support for the inclusion of S.4055, the bipartisan *Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act*, within the next coronavirus response package. This important legislation, sponsored by Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Rubio (R-FL), will supplement the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Nurse Corps scholarship & loan repayment programs, along with addressing long-standing health care shortages and bolstering emergency surge capacity through the existing National Disaster Medical System (NDMS).

Specifically, the *Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act* would support the NHSC and Nurse Corps programs to meet the challenges highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, by providing a one-time, supplemental appropriation for scholarship and loan forgiveness awards to address health provider shortages and gaps in our health care system. This funding would include a focus on recruiting health practitioners from historically underrepresented populations, such as racial and ethnic minorities and individuals from low-income urban and rural communities, which helps to improve retention and health outcomes and address disparities that have been compounded by the coronavirus.

Additionally, the *Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness* legislation would establish a demonstration project, which would allow members of the NHSC workforce to serve in emergency capacities through the NDMS. This pilot would expand our emergency preparedness capacity by enabling individuals serving in the NHSC, or alumni who continue to practice in a health shortage area, to be available for rapid deployment for health emergencies through the NDMS.

Nationwide, we have seen shortfalls in our health workforce capacity—whether in overstrained urban hospitals or in rural areas with too few providers to adequately meet the pandemic response. While our nation was already facing a projected shortage of hundreds of thousands of doctors, nurses, and other clinicians prior to COVID-19, there is an acute need to surge funding for our health workforce now. While we support separate longer-term efforts at extending the authorization for these programs, the coronavirus—and lack of funding for these programs in relief laws to date—underscores that supplemental through S.4055 is needed today.

To build our health workforce pipeline to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges, we strongly urge the next stimulus package include funding for the NHSC and Nurse Corps programs to support both patients and providers on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. The National

Health Service Corps and Nurse Corps programs have bipartisan support and proven record of success in supporting and maintaining access to care in our nation's most underserved communities—from low-income urban neighborhoods to frontier and rural communities with shortages of providers—and the NDMS is a backbone of our emergency response capabilities.

We appreciate your leadership during this public health emergency and strongly encourage the inclusion of S.4055, the *Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act*, within the next coronavirus response package to support the healthcare of all communities across the nation. Should you have any questions, or for more information, please contact Amanda Pears Kelly at apearskelly@clinicians.org

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Dental Association
American Association of Nurse Practitioners
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved
Council on Social Work Education
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Hispanic Medical Association
Nurse-Family Partnership
Physician Assistant Education Association