

May 25, 2021

The Honorable Maggie Hassan  
United States Senate  
324 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
United States Senate  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Hassan and Collins:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am pleased to offer our support for S. 1438, the “Opioid Workforce Act of 2021,” which would provide 1,000 additional Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) positions in hospitals that have, or are in the process of establishing, accredited residency programs in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, or pain medicine.

The United States is in the midst of an epidemic of illicit drug-related overdoses and deaths—stemming primarily from illicitly manufactured fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine and cocaine. The drug overdose epidemic has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Every day, more than 130 people in the United States die after a drug-related overdose.<sup>1</sup> Compounding this growing epidemic is a continued shortage in our health care workforce. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in 2017, an estimated 20.7 million Americans over the age of 12 had a substance use disorder related to alcohol or illicit drugs use, but only 1.5 percent received any substance use treatment.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from October 2019 to October 2020, nearly 89,000 Americans died of a drug-related overdose. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl analogs were involved in nearly 54,000 deaths; methamphetamine was involved in nearly 22,000 deaths and cocaine nearly 20,000 deaths during that same time.<sup>3</sup> Increasing the workforce also will help directly address long-standing inequities that have limited care to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders and pain for Black and Brown Americans.

Workforce experts predict that the U.S. will face a significant physician shortage for both primary care and specialty physicians over the next 10 years if training positions are not expanded, with the Association of American Medical Colleges predicting a shortage of 139,000 physicians by 2033.<sup>4</sup> Yet, while new medical schools are opening and existing medical schools are increasing their enrollment to meet the need for more physicians, federal support for residency positions remains subject to an outdated cap that still falls dramatically short of the needs of the U.S. population, despite Congress providing 1,000 additional Medicare supported slots in 2020. This legislation would bolster the numbers of health care professionals dedicated to serving on the front lines and battling the nation’s drug overdose epidemic each day.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://greatplainsqin.org/blog/cdc-releases-evidence-based-strategies-for-preventing-opioid-overdose/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHFFR2017/NSDUHFFR2017.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.

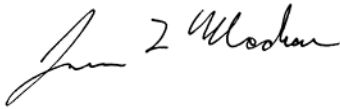
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/us-physician-shortage-growing>.

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As health care professionals, we are dedicated to improving public health and ensuring patients have access to proper care when and where they need it. There is much more that must be done to bring this epidemic under control, and we remain committed to working with Congress and the Administration to take the necessary steps to achieve that goal.

We appreciate your efforts to expand GME funding in accredited residency programs in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, and pain medicine, and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD