

January 29, 2024

The Honorable Tim Reed
South Dakota Senate
1409 Whitetail Path
Brookings, SD 57006

Re: American Medical Association **support** for Senate Bill 136, “An Act to expand the scope of a physician wellness program”

Dear Senator Reed:

On behalf of our physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I write in support of Senate Bill (SB) 136, “An Act to expand the scope of a physician wellness program.” South Dakota was one of the first states in the nation to adopt statutory protections in support of physicians who seek care for burnout, career fatigue, or wellness. These protections already have helped many South Dakota physicians feel more comfortable in seeking care—knowing that their care will be protected from inappropriate disclosure—and helping ensure patient safety. The AMA supports SB 136 because it demonstrates South Dakota’s continued leadership in taking the next critical step: to protect medical students.

Surveys of physicians increasingly show that burnout and career fatigue are increasing.^{1,2} Those surveys, along with additional research, also make clear that common reasons for not seeking care include the stigma of receiving care, fear of disclosing treatment on licensing and credentialing applications, and concern about repercussions of receiving treatment—such as being thought of as “weak” or not able to handle the rigors of being a physician. A more recent survey of medical students and residents shows that these harmful perceptions may even be more pervasive among medical students.³ For example, according to a June 2023 Physicians’ Foundation survey:

- Three-quarters of medical students have felt inappropriate feelings of anger, tearfulness, or anxiety, much more compared to residents (68 percent) and physicians (53 percent).
- 45 percent of students said they know a colleague/peer who has considered suicide ever and one-quarter know of a colleague/peer who has considered suicide in the past 12 months, which is significantly higher compared to residents and physicians.
- Nearly 80 percent of physicians, residents and medical students agree that there is stigma surrounding mental health and seeking mental health care among physicians.

¹ “Understanding the State of Physicians’ Wellbeing and Assessing Solutions to Address It.” The Physicians Foundation. July 2022. Available at <https://physiciansfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-Survey-of-Americas-Physicians-Part-2-of-3-Understanding-the-State-of-Physicians-Wellbeing-and-Assessing-Solutions-to-Address-It.pdf>.

² “‘I Cry but No One Cares’: Physician Burnout & Depression Report 2023.” Medscape. January 27, 2023. Available at https://www.medscape.com/slideshow/2023-lifestyle-burnout-6016058?icd=login_success_email_match_norm

³ “Amplifying Physician, Resident and Student Voices to Drive Wellbeing and Care Delivery Solutions.” The Physicians Foundation. June 2023. Available at https://physiciansfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/PF23_Brochure-Report_Americas-Physicians_V2b-1-2.pdf

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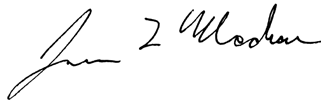
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- Nearly 50 percent of residents and medical students were either afraid or knew another colleague fearful of seeking mental health care given questions asked in medical licensure/credentialing/insurance applications.

The AMA supports SB 136 because by extending South Dakota’s existing wellness program protections to medical students enrolled at the school of medicine at the University of South Dakota, the legislature will be providing essential lifelines to the future of medicine. Supporting confidential care helps prevent tragedies, improves physician satisfaction, and protects patient safety. In addition to these important outcomes, SB 136 also will build confidence in and support for medical students, residents and practicing physicians. Current and future physicians will see South Dakota as a state that supports them—putting South Dakota at a competitive advantage when compared to states that do not provide such support for students, residents, and practicing physicians seeking care for health and wellness. By making it safer to seek care for medical students, SB 136 helps South Dakota become an even more attractive place to learn—and practice medicine. For these reasons, the AMA strongly supports and urges a “Yes” vote on SB 136.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD