



JAMES L. MADARA, MD
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, CEO

ama-assn.org
t (312) 464-5000

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The Honorable Bill Nelson
U.S. Senate
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dean Heller
U.S. Senate
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Nelson and Heller:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am pleased to offer our support for S. 2843, the “Opioid Workforce Act of 2018,” which would provide 1,000 additional Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) positions over five years in hospitals that have, or are in the process of establishing, accredited residency programs in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, or pain management.

The U.S. is in the midst of an epidemic of opioid-related overdose and death. Every day, more than 115 people in the U.S. die after overdosing on opioids. Compounding this growing epidemic is a continued shortage in our health care workforce. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in 2016, 20.1 million Americans over the age of 12 had a substance use disorder related to alcohol or illicit drugs use but only one-in-five received any substance use treatment.

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. Yet, while new medical schools are opening and existing medical schools are increasing their enrollments to meet the need for more physicians, federal support for residency positions is still subject to the outdated cap set in the late 1990s. This legislation would bolster the numbers of health care professionals dedicated to serving on the front lines and battling the nation’s opioid epidemic each day.

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 management, and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD