

August 6, 2020

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi
United States House of Representatives
115 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Katko
United States House of Representatives
2457 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for H.R.7255–Coronavirus Health Care Worker Wellness Act

Dear Representatives Krishnamoorthi and Katko:

On behalf of our physician and medical student members, the American Medical Association (AMA) is writing to **express our strong support for H.R. 7255, the “Coronavirus Health Care Worker Wellness Act”** and to urge the House of Representatives to pass the legislation.

The AMA has consistently advocated for physical and mental health care services for physicians and medical students. Health care workers are disproportionately affected by high rates of burnout and depression. More than half of all physicians in the United States report experiencing substantial symptoms of burnout, with the most severe symptoms occurring among those working at the front lines of medicine in fields such as emergency medicine, family medicine, and internal medicine.¹ In addition, physicians are at a significantly increased risk of suicide compared to the general population with suicide rates 40 percent higher in males and 130 percent higher in females.²

Concerning data from across the globe reveals a severe mental health crisis among health care workers that has only been intensified by COVID-19. Recent studies have shown that 49 percent of health care providers working directly with coronavirus patients in Italy and China are experiencing post-traumatic stress syndrome. Moreover, about 20 percent of health care workers in the studies had symptoms of depression, anxiety, and high perceived stress.³ Although physicians have received accolades from their communities for treating patients afflicted with COVID-19, numerous physicians have described feeling lost, alone, and unable to sleep.⁴ Not only are physicians in constant fear for the uncertainty of their patients' health, but there is also considerable anxiety surrounding the potential risks to their own health and the health of their families.

Bolstering mental health services for medical professionals during this time will help support those working tirelessly to heal our nation from the devastation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-standing and deeply ingrained stigma experienced by physicians seeking care for mental health conditions

¹<https://nam.edu/burnout-among-health-care-professionals-a-call-to-explore-and-address-this-underrecognized-threat-to-safe-high-quality-care/>.

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5483979/>.

³https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2766378?utm_source=For_The_Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=052820.

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/06/07/health-care-workers-coronavirus-burnout/?arc404=true>.

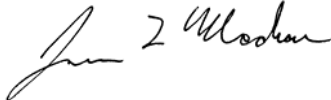
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has deterred providers from pursuing assistance. In the weeks, months, and years that follow this public health crisis, as our medical community selflessly focuses on providing care to our nation's most vulnerable, those physicians should be protected and assured care for their mental health without fear of repercussions or stigmatization.

H.R. 7255 seeks to expand access to mental health services for our health care workers by requiring the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) working in tandem with national professional medical organizations, to award grants to establish or expand programs dedicated to supporting the mental wellness of health care workers on the frontlines of COVID-19. In addition, the legislation requires HHS, also through AHRQ and in collaboration with national medical professional organizations, to complete a comprehensive study on mental health and burnout. The study seeks to find solutions for minimizing burnout in health care workers and alleviating the mental health stressors facing physicians treating COVID-19 patients.

As physicians experience great trauma and risk their lives throughout this pandemic, and are then expected to return to regular practices, readily available mental health services are needed in order to promptly address the suffering experienced during the public health crisis. For these reasons, the AMA strongly supports this legislation and urges the House of Representatives to pass H.R. 7255. Thank you in advance for your leadership in introducing the bipartisan Coronavirus Health Care Worker Wellness Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James L. Madara".

James L. Madara, MD