

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Donna Schaibley
Indiana House of Representatives
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Re: American Medical Association Support for Senate Bill 365,
“Wellness Programs for Physicians”

Dear Representative Schaibley:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill (S.B.) 365, “Wellness Programs for Physicians.” The AMA supports this bill because it will have a direct, positive impact to help physicians experiencing burnout and otherwise support physician wellness in an evidence-based, confidential manner. The AMA commends you for sponsoring S.B. 365, and we now urge the Indiana House of Representatives to pass this bill and send it to the governor for his signature.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, physician burnout was already a major challenge for the U.S. health care system, impacting nearly every aspect of clinical care. Recent studies show a national burnout rate of 43.9 percent among physicians in practice, including private practice, academic medical centers, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Physician burnout can lead to devastating consequences for patients and doctors. Physicians are among the most resilient, but the pressures and responsibilities affecting physicians do not always allow for opportunities for them to seek help or focus on what they need to remain resilient and healthy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has in some parts of the country pushed physician burnout to crisis levels, as physicians have been desperately needed to care for patients on the frontlines. Many physicians have for long periods of time been subject to extremely stressful conditions during the pandemic—conditions that have made them particularly vulnerable to negative mental and physical health effects. Stressors already present in their lives have become exacerbated, making the need to be able to obtain confidential counseling or other care more important than ever. It is important to distinguish that seeking assistance to ensure wellness is often separate and distinct from seeking care for an impairment—and that policy and care options provide for different levels of care while retaining key confidentiality protections to encourage physicians to voluntarily seek the care they may need.

The AMA supports S.B. 365 because it addresses the above concerns in a very positive and non-threatening manner to:

- Further the goal of supporting physicians who seek professional support to address career fatigue, burnout and behavioral health concerns with important confidentiality and immunity protections;

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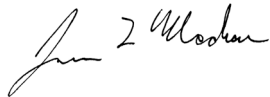
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- Enable physicians, who may avoid seeking help in other programs because of the fear of potential negative repercussions, to get the help they need; and
- Balance the appropriate role of the medical board to protect the public safety for impaired physicians with the public need to encourage physicians to seek help for issues that may be causing high levels of stress that can be successfully addressed through a physician wellness program.

For the above reasons, the AMA urges the Indiana House of Representatives to vote “yes” on S.B. 365. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and timely issue.

Sincerely,

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

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Indiana State Medical Association