

April 12, 2021

The Honorable Bob Menendez
United States Senate
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Senators Menendez and Collins:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to express our support for S. 412, the “National Coronavirus Commission Act of 2021.” This legislation would create a bipartisan, bicameral National Coronavirus Commission to provide a comprehensive review of the actions that have been taken to address the Coronavirus pandemic and to develop policy recommendations for future public health emergencies.

With over 550,000 individuals in the U.S. who have died as a result of COVID-19, it is critical that our federal government evaluate our shortcomings and successes over the past year and provide evidence-based guidelines to protect our patients from COVID-19 and other future infectious pathogens.¹ Between March 1, 2020, and January 2, 2021, the U.S. experienced 22.9 percent or 522,368 more deaths than expected. This mortality rate was significantly higher among Black and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations.² The National Coronavirus Commission Act of 2021 would establish a ten-person independent committee of individuals appointed by Congress and the President with expertise in government service, public health, commerce, scientific research, public administration, intelligence gathering, national security, and/or foreign affairs. This committee would be required to make a full and nonpartisan accounting of the United States’ preparedness for, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic, including the health and economic impacts on underserved communities, rural populations, racial and ethnic minority populations, older adults, and all other populations with relevant health or economic disparities.

Given the challenges that patients, physicians, hospitals, health care facilities, and our communities have endured and continue to experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, the AMA believes that a thorough examination of U.S. preparations for and response to the pandemic is warranted. Our federal government needs to prevent and remedy the problems experienced during this pandemic regarding effective testing strategies, timely directives on appropriate utilization of social distancing, evidence-supported efforts to maintain strategic stockpiles of Personal Protective Equipment, ventilators, and other supplies, and to inform future health system preparedness.

This bill would also provide tangible guidance through a formal report to the President and Congress on the Commission’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations to prevent, detect, respond to, and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics, protect the health security of the United States, and reestablish the role of the United States as a global leader in epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response. The

¹ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>

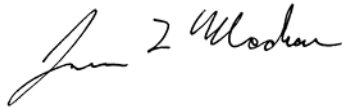
² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2778361>

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AMA looks forward to partnering with Congress to provide crucial physician insight and expertise in pandemic preparedness and response given the essential role that physicians have played throughout the U.S. COVID-19 response. As such, we believe that the bill could be improved by including on the Commission at least one physician with expertise in pandemic preparedness and response. We also recommend that the bill be amended to expand the scope of non-hospital, private sector entities that the Commission examines in terms of preparedness to include other health care sites, specifically physician offices, clinics, and ambulatory surgery centers.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to working with you to see the National Coronavirus Commission Act enacted this session. This legislation will help to protect the health of our residents and our country, as well as ensure that we are better prepared for the next public health emergency.

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