

March 29, 2022

The Honorable Karen Fann
President of the Senate
Arizona State Senate
Arizona State Capitol Complex
1700 W. Washington Street, Room 205
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Rick Gray
Majority Leader
Arizona State Senate
Arizona State Capitol Complex
1700 W. Washington Street, Room 212
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Rebecca Rios
Minority Leader
Arizona State Senate
Arizona State Capitol Complex
1700 W. Washington Street, Room 213
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Re: American Medical Association Support for House Bill 2429 “Physician Wellness Programs”

Dear President Fann, Majority Leader Gray, and Minority Leader Rios:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in strong support of House Bill (H.B.) 2429, “Physician Wellness Programs.” The AMA supports this bill because it will have a direct, positive impact in helping physicians and other health care professionals when experiencing burnout and otherwise supporting physicians’ and health professionals’ wellness in an evidence-based, confidential manner. We urge the Arizona Senate to vote “Yes” on this essential public health and wellness legislation and send H.B. 2429 to the governor for 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 and health care professional burnout can lead to devastating consequences for patients and physicians. Physicians and nurses are among the most resilient, but the pressures and responsibilities affecting them do not always allow 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 and health care professional burnout to crisis levels, as these professionals have been desperately needed on the frontlines to care for patients. For long periods of time during the pandemic, many physicians have been subject to extremely stressful conditions—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 obtain confidential counseling or other care more important than ever. It is important, furthermore, to distinguish how 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 seek the care they may need voluntarily.

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Page 2

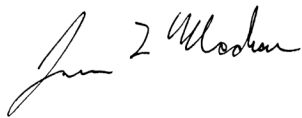
The AMA supports H.B. 2429 because it clearly addresses the above issues and concerns in a straightforward manner that:

- Encourages health care professionals to seek care when needed in a wellness program that can directly respond to the professional's wellness needs.
- Ensures that a record of a health professional's participation in a wellness program is confidential and has additional legal protections that should provide further encouragement to physicians and other health care professionals to seek help when needed.
- Balances the appropriate role of the health care professional licensing boards to protect the public safety for an impaired licensee with the public need to encourage physicians and other health care professionals to seek help for issues that may be causing high levels of stress that can be successfully addressed through a wellness program.

For the above reasons, the AMA urges the Arizona Senate to vote "Yes" on H.B. 2429. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,



James L. Madara, MD

cc: Arizona Medical Association
Arizona State Senate