

April 4, 2022

The Honorable Dan Kildee
United States House of Representatives
200 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States House of Representatives
1724 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jackie Walorski
United States House of Representatives
466 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Richard Hudson
United States House of Representatives
2112 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kildee, Walorski, Blunt Rochester, and Hudson:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to express our support for H.R. 6072, the “Leveraging Integrated Networks in Communities (LINC) to Address Social Needs Act.” The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to address the numerous nonmedical, yet critical, factors and conditions that impact an individual’s health including: economic stability, neighborhoods free from environmental toxins, transportation, education and life opportunities, food security, quality and safe housing, community/social support, and access to health care. The AMA applauds you for introducing this legislation, which requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to issue competitively awarded grants to states to support public-private partnerships that facilitate critical network infrastructure support. This funding is designed to promote enhanced communication capabilities among physicians, social services, and community resources to help patients overcome longstanding challenges associated with social determinants of health.

The fragmentation in health care delivery and lack of coordination between social service organizations and health care organizations make it difficult for states to promote coordinated service delivery and manage public health emergencies. The health care and social services sectors are not generally connected in a sustainable, standardized way, which limits data sharing, shared accountability, and service coordination. This bicameral, bipartisan legislation will serve as a catalyst to enable states, through public-private partnerships, to leverage local expertise and technology to overcome longstanding challenges in helping to connect people to food, housing, child development, job training, and transportation supports and services.

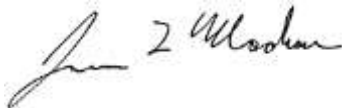
Research increasingly points to the important role of the social determinants of health, which affect approximately 80 percent of patient health outcomes. The AMA believes that the provision of health care services, as well as optimizing the social determinants of health, are ethical obligations of a civil society. However, this requires partnerships among all levels of government, the private sector, and non-profit, philanthropic, and tribal organizations, to address these crucial non-medical factors that dramatically affect patient outcomes. While it is critical to recognize and understand the impact of social determinants of health, it is even more important to develop solutions to address these key factors. The LINC to Address Social Needs Act is a big step towards achieving these important policy goals.

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The AMA also appreciates your support for changing the legislative text as introduced to add data privacy protection standards for the health information that would be shared by physicians to community-based organizations (CBOs) and the technology companies facilitating connections between these entities. The data privacy protection language currently in the House bill states that authorized activities must have “appropriate privacy and security protections in place, in accordance with Federal and State privacy laws.” Our concern is that, generally, there are no such federal laws applicable to non-covered entities like the CBOs. As a result, we applaud your leadership in recognizing this unintended consequence and including new text pertaining to appropriate security and privacy protections for all associated entities. This additional language makes the data privacy protections more robust, and we greatly appreciate your ongoing efforts to ensure the committees of jurisdiction work to advance this improved version of the legislation.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to working with you to achieve passage of the amended version of the LINC to Address Social Needs Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD