

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
NEUROLOGICAL SURGEONS

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American
Association of
Neurological
Surgeons



Congress of
Neurological
Surgeons

CONGRESS OF
NEUROLOGICAL SURGEONS

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President
SHELLY D. TIMMONS, MD, PHD
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March 4, 2019

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

The Honorable John Boozman
United States Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

SUBJECT: Endorsement of S. 348, the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act

Dear Senators Menendez, Boozman and Schumer,

On behalf of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, we are writing to endorse your legislation, S. 348, the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act.

As you know, the federal government is the largest single funding source for graduate medical education (GME), and these contributions are essential to train the best and brightest physicians in the world. And while each year public funding to support GME tops \$16 billion the nation is facing an acute shortage of physicians due to an aging population and the expansion of health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). According to research conducted by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), we are facing a severe shortage of between 42,600 and 121,300 physicians by 2030 — with a shortfall of up to 49,300 in primary care and 72,700 in specialty care (including surgeons). The supply of surgeons, in particular, is projected to have little growth by 2030, but projected demand is expected to increase, resulting in a shortage of between 20,700 and 30,500 surgeons by 2030. And while medical schools in the U.S. have increased their enrollments, and additional medical and osteopathic schools have been established, the number of Medicare-funded resident positions has been capped by law at 1996 levels.

An appropriate supply of well-educated and trained physicians — both in specialty and primary care — is essential to ensure access to quality health care services for all Americans. Unfortunately, current GME payments do not cover the real expenses that academic medical center departments incur to train residents, straining our ability support more residents to fill the physician workforce gaps. It costs approximately \$1.2 million to train a neurosurgical resident. Contributions from government and other payers fall well short of covering this expense. Academic medical centers have generally been able to support the expansion of residency programs out of departmental operational funds since the institution of the GME financing caps in 1997. However, this is increasingly no longer possible, as payments to hospitals dwindle and fewer dollars are available for such cross-subsidization.

The AANS and CNS, therefore, applaud your efforts to address the serious problem. Your bill will improve the nation's GME system and help to preserve access to specialty care by:

- Increasing the number of Medicare-supported GME residency slots by 15,000 over the next five years;

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- Directing one-half of the newly available positions to training in shortage specialties;
- Specifying priorities for distributing the new slots (e.g., states with new medical schools); and
- Studying strategies to increase the diversity of the health professional workforce.

Thank you for leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to working with you to move this legislation forward. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Shelly D. Timmons, MD, PhD, President
American Association of Neurological Surgeons



Ganesh Rao, MD, President
Congress of Neurological Surgeons

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