



Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA, Executive Vice President, CEO

June 23, 2009

The Honorable Richard Burr
United States Senate
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burr:

On behalf of the physicians and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am pleased to offer our strong support for your amendment to the "Affordable Health Choices Act," which restores the debt-to-income pathway (20/220 pathway) for economic hardship deferment that many medical residents rely upon. Helping our medical students finance their education and assisting our medical students, resident physicians, and young physicians to better manage their high student loan debt burden is one of the AMA's top legislative priorities.

High medical student debt, averaging \$155,000 for 88 percent of U.S. medical school graduates, is a significant hardship throughout the loan repayment period, especially during the three to seven years of training in medical residency programs. The average first-year stipend for medical residents is low, making it difficult for medical residents to train in urban areas where the cost of living is high. The high debt burden that many medical graduates face often influences their career choices. Borrowers with high loan debt are often deterred from entering public health service, practicing medicine in underserved areas, starting a career in medical education or research, or practicing primary care medicine. In addition, loan deferment programs like the 20/220 pathway are vital for ensuring that health care professionals represent the diverse makeup of the general population, and are available to communities across the country, particularly those in underserved areas.

Several studies confirm that the United States faces a physician shortage. The Council on Graduate Medical Education (COGME) predicts a shortage of 85,000 physicians by the year 2020. Complicating student debt repayment by allowing the 20/220 pathway to expire could further deter students from pursuing a career in medicine. With your proposal to reinstate the 20/220 economic hardship deferment eligibility criterion and broaden the qualification criterion from 100 to 150 percent of the poverty level line, medical residents would be able to focus on their medical training and development during the critical and challenging years of residency and not on the burden of their debt.

The Honorable Richard Burr
June 23, 2009
Page 2

We believe that your amendment to restore the 20/220 pathway is an important step in addressing one aspect of the projected physician shortage, and vital to health care reform and ensuring access to care. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Maves". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA