

Jan. 29, 2021: National Advocacy Update

Senate introduces legislation to address health workforce shortages and disparities

On Jan. 26, Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) introduced S.54, the Strengthening America's Health Care Readiness Act. This AMA-supported legislation would strengthen the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Nurse Corps programs to help meet the challenges highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, by providing a one-time, supplemental appropriation for scholarship and loan forgiveness awards to address health provider shortages and gaps in our health care system, while investing in the pipeline of future health providers. In an effort to improve workforce retention and cultural competency, the funding would be focused on recruiting health care practitioners from racial and ethnic minoritized populations and individuals from low-income urban and rural communities.

AMA applauds the end of zero-tolerance immigration policy

On Jan. 26, the Justice Department formally ended (PDF) the zero-tolerance policy that was enacted by the Trump Administration. This policy led to thousands of migrant children being separated from their families, leaving hundreds of children still parted from their parents to this day. Due to the mental health and medical harm that results from separating children from their parents, the AMA staunchly opposed (PDF) the zero-tolerance policy and applauds the Biden Administration for putting an end to this detrimental practice.

Bipartisan House bill seeks further delay of Medicare sequester

To help alleviate the unyielding financial burden of the COVID-19 pandemic on physicians, Representatives Brad Schneider (D-IL) and David McKinley (R-WV) introduced H.R. 315, the Medicare Sequester COVID Moratorium Act. This bipartisan bill would extend the current suspension of the two percent across-the-board Medicare sequester for the duration of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

AMA advocacy efforts throughout the 116th Congress prompted federal lawmakers to delay the sequester numerous times in 2020. Most recently, the imposition of the Medicare sequester was postponed until March 31st following enactment of H.R. 133, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. Although the approval and ongoing distribution of two vaccines provides great hope that COVID-19 will abate in the coming months, the virus continues to ravage much of the United States. In the interim, physicians continue to experience fewer patient visits and lower revenue in comparison to before the start of the pandemic.

The AMA applauds Representatives Schneider and McKinley for their bipartisan leadership and continues to work with members of the House of Representatives and Senate in support of adding H.R. 315 to a potential larger bill offering additional COVID-19 relief.

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