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Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce
Health Subcommittee
“Examining Existing Federal Programs to Build a Stronger Health Workforce and Improve
Primary Care”
April 19, 2023

The PA Education Association (PAEA), representing the 303 accredited PA programs in the United States, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding current health workforce investments and legislation under consideration to strengthen these efforts.

As health systems and communities throughout the United States continue to grapple with growing shortages of health care providers, congressional action to expand existing workforce investments is critical. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is anticipated to face a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034.¹ While currently funded workforce programs play an important role in ensuring a sufficient supply of well-trained providers, this projected shortfall illustrates the need for significantly higher levels of funding for all primary care disciplines to effectively meet demand for needed care.

¹ Association of American Medical Colleges. (2021). *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2019 to 2034*. <https://www.aamc.org/media/54681/download>.

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Throughout its history, the PA profession has played a unique role in responding to primary care provider shortages. Originally founded in the mid-1960s specifically to address projected shortages of primary care physicians, PA education is based on an accelerated medical model that allows graduates to quickly enter the workforce. The typical PA program lasts approximately 27 months and is divided into a didactic, or classroom-based phase, followed by a clinical phase. During students' clinical year, they complete a series of clinical rotations in primary care, behavioral health, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery, and emergency medicine, among other specialties. Based upon this generalist training, graduates are equipped, once certified and licensed, to provide the full range of medical services patients expect and deserve, including diagnosing illnesses, developing treatment plans, and prescribing medications.

As Congress considers steps to strengthen current workforce programs, PAEA urges the subcommittee to dedicate particular attention to funding for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). Prior to September 30, Congress must take action to prevent a lapse in mandatory funding for the NHSC scholarship and loan repayment programs. For over 50 years, the NHSC has been one of the federal government's largest investments in workforce distribution, making loan repayment and scholarship agreements with clinicians and students in exchange for a practice commitment in an underserved community.

In 2021, a supplemental investment of \$800 million for the NHSC resulted in field strength growing from 13,053 providers in fiscal year 2019 to 20,215 providers in fiscal year 2022, an increase of nearly 55%.² This temporary funding increase allowed HRSA to provide awards to nearly all eligible applicants, thereby significantly increasing access to care in underserved communities. However, in the absence of adjusted mandatory funding levels, it is likely that HRSA will return to being unable to fund a majority of eligible applicants, reducing the

² Health Resources and Services Administration. (2022). *Bureau of Health Workforce Field Strength and Students and Trainees Dashboards*. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/field-strength>.



impact of a program that has a more than 80% retention rate for clinicians in underserved communities two years following their service commitment.³

PAEA applauds the subcommittee's attention to the NHSC through its consideration of the bipartisan Strengthening Community Care Act, which would reauthorize the NHSC's mandatory funding stream for five years. **As the subcommittee considers this legislation, PAEA urges members to adopt the mandatory funding levels proposed in the bipartisan Restoring America's Health Care Workforce and Readiness Act of \$625 million in fiscal year 2024, \$675 million in fiscal year 2025, and \$825 million in fiscal year 2026.** These funding levels would allow for the maintenance of current field strength while allowing for continued growth to mitigate future shortages.

PAEA appreciates the opportunity to provide the Association's perspective on existing workforce investments and looks forward to serving as a resource to members and staff. Should you require additional information or have questions, please contact Tyler Smith, Senior Director of Government Relations, at tsmith@PAAonline.org or 703-667-4356.

³ Health Resources and Services Administration. (2023). *Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees*. <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2024.pdf>.