



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

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January 27, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the 64,000 osteopathic physicians it represents, I would like to congratulate you for your leadership with respect to the “American Recovery Investment Act” (H.R. 1). As our nation faces difficult economic challenges, this legislation aims to assist Americans and their families with some of their pressing economic needs and creates several pathways towards improving our economy and health care system.

The AOA supports many provisions of your legislation, but would like to provide comments on four major areas of H.R. 1—Coverage and Access, Health Information Technology, Primary Care Training, and Prevention and Wellness:

Coverage and Access

The AOA is pleased that H.R. 1 contains several provisions aimed at ensuring continued coverage of health care services during the economic downturn. The AOA supports the extension of COBRA benefits and the provisions of additional resources to state governments to assist with their Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Programs (CHIP). As unemployment rises, many families rely upon COBRA benefits or turn to state programs for their health care coverage. Over 40 states face budget shortfalls and many will be forced to apply savings measures to Medicaid and CHIP if additional support is not provided. We have communicated our support for reauthorization of the CHIP program in previous communications. We urge the House and Senate to send this important legislation to the President as soon as possible ensuring that the looming March expiration is not realized.

The AOA urges that we all remain mindful that the temporary fixes in H.R. 1 must not be viewed as long-term solutions to the access to care issues many Americans face. However, they are appropriate steps that address the immediate need of many individuals and families.

Health Information Technology

We applaud the inclusion of provisions in H.R. 1 that make an investment in the creation of an interoperable and widely adopted health information infrastructure. The AOA supports the implementation of health information technologies as a means of improving the quality, safety, and efficiency of our health care system. Additionally, we believe that such advancements are key to transforming the delivery system through such concepts as the patient-centered medical home.

Over the past few years, our members have expressed concerns regarding the lack of interoperability standards for health information and the costs associated with adopting these technologies in their practices—especially small practices in underserved urban and rural communities. We are pleased that H.R. 1 includes provisions that establish standards and that the legislation makes a substantial investment in assisting the adoption of such technologies.

We urge you to reconsider the creation of new bodies charged with the development of standards and policies for HIT. Several existing groups already have completed substantial work in these areas. We urge you to include them as the bodies charged with the tasks prescribed in the legislation.

Finally, while we applaud the concept of financial incentives followed by penalties as a reasonable methodology, we must raise concern with the dates included in your legislation. We look forward to working with you and the Committees of jurisdiction to establish compliance dates that will facilitate a seamless adoption process across the nation.

Primary Care Training

The AOA strongly supports provisions included in H.R. 1 that would provide \$600 million towards improving primary care. Those provisions include an increase in funding for the training programs under Title VII and loan repayment programs such as the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). The AOA strongly support the NHSC and believes that Title VII programs have the ability to increase the number of primary care physicians.

We urge the inclusion of provisions that would provide financial incentives to hospitals seeking to start residency programs in primary care and general surgery. The nation faces a significant shortage of physicians in the near future. The most looming shortages are in family medicine, internal medicine, and general surgery. We strongly encourage the House to amend H.R. 1 during the conference process by including provisions contained in the “Physician Workforce and Graduate Medical Education Enhancement Act” (H.R. 2583), which was introduced in the 110th Congress by Representatives Matheson and Burgess. This legislation would provide interest free loans to hospitals starting new residency training programs in family medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, and other essential specialties.

Prevention and Wellness Fund

The AOA applauds the inclusion of money to establish and fund activities aimed at improving prevention and wellness. The osteopathic profession has a long history of focusing care on these two important issues—we are pleased that they are now gaining prominence in the public debate. The AOA encourages you to allocate a substantial portion of this funding towards assisting primary care physicians as they implement the patient-centered medical home concept into their practices.

We strongly believe that prevention and wellness can best be addressed when a patient has a consistent relationship with a primary care physician. The medical home is the practice model that has proven effective at enhancing the patient-physician relationship and improving quality and outcomes.

Again, we applaud your leadership and that of your Committee Chairmen who have dedicated their talents to this legislation. The AOA and our members look forward to working with you to secure adoption of H.R. 1 and its timely enactment into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carlo J. DiMarco, DO." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Carlo J. DiMarco, DO
President

C: The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles Rangel, Chairman, Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chairman, Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable David Obey, Chairman, Appropriations Committee