

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
United States Senate
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Todd Young
United States Senate
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kaine, Senator Reed, Senator Young, and Senator Cassidy:

On behalf of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) and our 41,000 members, thank you for introducing the “Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act.” This important legislation seeks to address the significant mental health challenges facing emergency physicians and other frontline health care workers who continue to provide lifesaving care during the most serious public health crisis of our lifetime. As the health care safety net providers, ACEP is grateful for your leadership on this important issue and for helping carry on Dr. Breen’s legacy.

At our core, emergency physicians are healers, and we seek to provide all of our patients with the compassionate care they need and deserve. Emergency medicine can be a turbulent and overwhelming field for all the physicians, nurses, and other health care providers who are faced with life and death consequences each day. In fact, emergency physicians and emergency medicine residents can experience high rates of burnout at 65 percent during their career, and emergency medicine ranks among the top five specialties for burnout. These challenges have been exacerbated by the unprecedented scale and impact of the coronavirus on our health care system, and many emergency physicians have been deeply affected by the toll it has taken on far too many of our patients and their families.

Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a toll on the mental health of emergency physicians as well, and we do not yet know the full extent it will have on those working on the front lines. This virus is the greatest public health threat of our time, yet many emergency physicians feel they have not been provided with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) they need to stay safe and continue providing care. Some hospitals and facilities have been stretched beyond capacity, forcing emergency physicians to make excruciating decisions due to sparse resources. And still many emergency physicians maintain social distance, isolating themselves away from friends and family in order to keep them safe and healthy – often retreating to solitude in hotel rooms, garages, or even tents in backyards for weeks and months at a time.

Your legislation seeks to address the significant mental health challenges affecting physicians and health care workers through both near- and long-term strategies. Recognizing the pressing need for mental health services in light of the COVID-19

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pandemic, your legislation provides grants to health care providers and medical professional associations to establish or expand mental wellness programs for health care workers. Including medical professional associations is an important provision as these organizations are particularly well-equipped to reach the clinicians they represent and address concerns or needs that may be unique to their specialty. Over the longer-term, the bill also establishes grants to train up-and-coming generations of physicians in evidence-based strategies to reduce and prevent suicide and address other mental health conditions, and also provides for a comprehensive study on the factors contributing to poor mental health and burnout for health care workers, what barriers to treatment may exist (such as stigma and concerns about licensing and credentialing), and what solutions may be effective addressing these issues.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and advocacy to ensure that emergency physicians and health care workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 response have access to the mental health resources they need so that they in turn are able to continue providing the lifesaving care patients need and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William P. Jaquis".

William P. Jaquis, MD, MSHQS, FACEP
ACEP President