

November 27, 2023

The Honorable Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Joyce, M.D.
U.S. House of Representatives
152 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
U.S. Senate
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Deborah Ross
U.S. House of Representatives
1221 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act. (S. 705/ H.R. 2761)

Dear Senators Rosen and Wicker and Representatives Joyce and Ross:

On behalf of the undersigned physician organizations, we offer our unwavering support for the Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act. (S. 705/ H.R. 2761). This bipartisan legislation establishes a new loan repayment program to incentivize specialty physicians to practice in rural areas and expand access for many Americans who do not have specialty physicians available to treat them.

The demand for specialty physicians throughout the United States continues to outpace the supply, especially in rural America. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis projects that by 2035 there will be a 93 percent adequacy level (adequacy is the relationship between the projected future supply and projected future demand) across the country to serve patients across 35 medical specialties. However, the disparity in metro areas compared to non-metro areas is even more stark. Metro areas have a 102 percent adequacy level, while non-metro areas will have only 29 percent of the providers necessary to serve the population.¹ This alarming inequity demonstrates the need to incentivize specialists to practice in non-metro areas.

In addition, the average cost of medical school has resulted in graduates having an incredibly large amount of student loan debt that continues to grow each year. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the average cost of attendance for four years of medical school in 2023 is \$268,000 (public institution) and \$363,000 (private institution), which is a two percent increase from the class of 2022. In addition, over 71 percent of medical students have some amount of student loan debt, and 53 percent have \$200,000 or more. These factors make it imperative that policymakers take action to help reduce the financial burden on young physicians and incentivize them to practice in those areas of the country with the highest need.²

We look forward to working with you and the Congressional leadership to advance and pass the Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act. (S. 705/ H.R. 2761).

1. Health Resources & Services Administration. Workforce Projections. Accessed August 16, 2023. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/workforce-projections>
2. Association of American Medical Colleges. Medical Student Education: Debt, Costs, and Loan Repayment Fact Card for the Class of 2022; October 2022. Accessed August 16, 2023. https://store.aamc.org/downloadable/download/sample/sample_id/575/

Sincerely,

American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery
American Academy of Sleep Medicine
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Radiology
American College of Rheumatology
American College of Surgeons
American Gastroenterological Association
American Medical Association
American Society Anesthesiologists
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Reproductive Medicine
American Urological Association
College of Pathologists
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Renal Physicians Association
Society of Interventional Radiology
Society of Thoracic Surgeons