



March 22, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

AOA Recommendations re: Support for Frontline Physicians in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the “CARES Act”:

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the more than 151,000 osteopathic physicians and medical students we represent, thank you for the steps you have already taken and will continue to take in order to protect Americans during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Osteopathic physicians (DOs) are on the frontline of healthcare delivery in primary care, emergency medicine, and other medical specialties. DOs are providing care for patients, in-person and virtually, across all practice settings and in every state.

As COVID-19 continues to spread across our country, the AOA strongly urges Congress to take additional steps to protect the people who are caring for all Americans at this critical time. Physicians often do not have the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) available to them, the shortage of masks, being one of many examples. The media broadcasting images of physicians wearing surgical masks may imply that they are adequately protected, but they are not. The CDC recently scaled back their recommendation requiring N95 respirators to be worn at all times around patients with COVID-19. The genesis of this change appears to be a lack of supply, as opposed equivalency of safety. Some physicians may be using home made masks, such as bandanas, as listed in the CDC recommendations as a last resort. The physicians on the front lines of care delivery are our nation’s safety net. If we don’t protect them, we risk collapse of our healthcare system.

In addition, when physicians or their loved ones contract COVID-19, they should be afforded the same rights to sick or medical leave as others.

The AOA believes that hand in hand collaboration between Congress and the administration is fundamental to meeting the current and future patient demands during the COVID-19 outbreak. With

the President invoking the Defense Production Act, and Congress continuing to develop bipartisan legislation, this partnership will be crucial in addressing the nation's needs. The top concerns being expressed by DOs is the urgent need to increase the supply of PPE, and the need for medical leave if they or family members are exposed to COVID-19 or become ill.

Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

Safety for both patients and frontline providers during the COVID-19 outbreak is key to flattening the curve. With that said, the United States is quickly exhausting our resources of PPE for these critical frontline providers. Equipment currently needed are N95 respirators, gowns, surgical masks, eye protection, and intensive care unit (ICU) equipment. Without continuous access to these critical items, safety for both patients and providers will be greatly jeopardized, which could lead to overall worse outcomes and the continual spread of the virus.

Congress, in tandem with the Administration, must take swift and decisive action to increase production and distribution of these items if we have any hope of maintaining an effective and productive healthcare ecosystem in the United States now and in the future.

Should an increase in PPE fail to materialize, Congress will need to act swiftly to ensure that the Defense Production Act and any other appropriate tools are being utilized to the fullest extent possible. If physicians and other healthcare professionals contract COVID-19, countless Americans may be delayed in receiving access to the care they need or worse, this could jeopardize healthcare delivery as we know it and rely upon in the United States.

Medical Leave for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals:

The AOA supported the passage of H.R. 6201 – the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and understands the critical nature of having physicians ready for the mass influx of patients that are anticipated as COVID-19 continues to spread across the County. However, we are concerned that section 3105 of the Act specifically exempts health care employers from the emergency family and medical leave provisions. The AOA recommends that federal funding for paid family, medical and sick leave be expanded to ensure that physicians have access to medical leave or receive other financial relief to offset any related costs associated with necessary time off because of personal illness or to care for a family member. While well intended, this law could compel physicians and other health care professionals to go to work, because of financial burden, even if they or a loved one are sick. This could lead to poor outcomes and possible spread of COVID-19.

Conclusion:

The AOA greatly appreciates your efforts to not only improve access to care and coverage, but to also improve the health and well-being of all Americans during this unprecedented pandemic. As new therapies and our understanding of the virus continue to evolve, we look forward to continuing to work with your offices and stand ready to be a resource to you during this difficult time as to ensure that every American has access to the highest-quality of care. Thank you for your leadership and all that you are doing for our country.

If you have any questions regarding the recommendations outlined above, please reach out to David Pugach, JD, AOA Senior Vice President of Public Policy, at DPugach@osteopathic.org or (202) 349-8753 if you have any questions, or if the AOA can be a resource in any way.

Sincerely,



Ronald R. Burns, DO, FACOFP
President, AOA



Kevin M. Klauer, DO, EJD
Chief Executive Officer, AOA