



Sound Policy. Quality Care.

February 17, 2021

The Honorable David McKinley, P.E.
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter Welch
2187 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for H.R. 944

Dear Representatives McKinley and Welch:

As the Alliance of Specialty Medicine (Alliance), our mission is to advocate for sound federal health care policy that fosters patient access to the highest quality specialty care. On behalf of more than 100,000 specialty physicians, the Alliance writes in support of H.R. 944, which would improve access to care in rural America through a student loan forgiveness program for specialty physicians.

According to a 2019 statement from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), 252 counties in the rural United States are without a single healthcare provider¹. Further, a specialty such as urology can only be found in 38 percent of all U.S. counties, and the number of gastroenterologists per 100,000 people varies between rural (.39) and urban (2.55) U.S. counties as well. This variation highlights the access barriers that exist for colorectal cancer screenings and the increased colorectal cancer mortality rates in rural counties. With one-fifth of Americans living in a non-urban region and only 11 percent of physicians practicing in those same areas, access to preventive measures and lifesaving treatments is severely limited for millions of U.S. citizens.

Moreover, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that rural Americans are more likely to die from issues like heart disease and cancer than their urban counterparts^{2,3}. Incidence of heart disease are 56 percent higher in non-urban settings², and while incidences of common cancers (such as lung, colon, and prostate) are less likely in non-urban settings, mortality rates are found to be

¹ Health Resources and Services Administration. (2019, February 21). *Rural Health Disparities to the Fore*. Retrieved October 03, 2019, from Health Resources and Services Administration: <https://www.hrsa.gov/enews/past-issues/2019/february-21/rural-health-disparities>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017, January 12). *Rural Americans at higher risk of death from five leading causes*. Retrieved October 03, 2019, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p0112-rural-death-risk.html>

³ Moy E, Garcia MC, Bastain B, et al. (2017, January 13). *Leading Causes of Death in Nonmetropolitan and Metropolitan Areas — United States, 1999–2014*. Retrieved October 03, 2019, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6601a1>

higher⁴. Joint research by the CDC and HRSA shows that lack of access to preventive screenings and specialized care contribute to these increased mortality rates^{1,2}.

Your legislation would improve access to essential health services for many Americans by helping to increase the number of practicing specialty physicians in rural America. For these reasons, the undersigned organizations of the Alliance support your legislation and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Facial Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American College of Mohs Surgery
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American Gastroenterological Association
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
American Society of Echocardiography
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
American Society of Retina Specialists
American Urological Association
Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
North American Spine Society

⁴ Callaghan TH, Ferdinand AO, et al. (2018, November). *Cancer Mortality in Rural America 1999-2016*. Retrieved October 03, 2019, from Southwest Rural Health Research Center: <https://srhrc.tamhsc.edu/docs/srhrc-pb4-callaghan-cancer.pdf>