



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION
TREATING OUR FAMILY AND YOURS



February 7, 2018

The Honorable Arthur Orr
Alabama State Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee
11 South Union Street
Suite 730
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Chairman Orr:

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the Alabama Osteopathic Medical Association (ALOMA) are writing to urge you to support SB 210, and to request amendments. This bill establishes the Alabama Physician Initiative to provide scholarships for Alabama medical students who agree to practice family medicine in rural areas of the state. While the bill recognizes allopathic medical colleges and residencies accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, it fails to include equivalency for osteopathic medical colleges and residency programs accredited by the American Osteopathic Association. The AOA and ALOMA support the intent of this bill, and believe that it will help alleviate physician workforce shortage concerns and work toward providing an adequate supply of physicians in underserved Alabama areas in the future. However, we respectfully request amendments to reflect osteopathic equivalency in accordance with Alabama law.¹

The AOA represents 137,000 osteopathic physicians (DOs) and osteopathic medical students, promotes public health, encourages scientific research, serves as the primary certifying body for DOs and is the accrediting agency for osteopathic medical schools. More information on DOs/osteopathic medicine can be found at www.osteopathic.org. ALOMA is a professional medical organization that represents over 600 DOs providing patient care in Alabama.

The AOA and ALOMA are committed to working with the State of Alabama to help address primary care workforce shortages and provide adequate access to high quality health care for patients. Indeed, the osteopathic medical profession has long emphasized the importance of providing primary care to patients in rural and underserved areas.

The osteopathic medical profession's commitment to primary care and the State of Alabama:

- More than **50% of DOs practice in primary care.**²
- While DOs make up **11% of all US physicians**, they are responsible for **16% of patient visits** in communities with **populations of fewer than 2,500.**³

¹ <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/codeofalabama/1975/34-24-70.htm>.

² 2017 Osteopathic Medical Profession Report, American Osteopathic Association. Available at: <https://www.osteopathic.org/inside-aoa/about/aoa-annual-statistics/Documents/2017-omp-report.pdf>.

- Overall, **40% of all physicians** who are located in medically underserved areas or who treat medically underserved populations are **osteopathic physicians**.⁴
- There are two osteopathic medical schools located in the state: the **Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine (ACOM)** in Dothan and the **Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine - Auburn Campus (VCOM)**. Last year, **25% of ACOM's inaugural class of 162 students matched into family medicine** residency programs; however, only **ten percent matched within the state**.^{5,6} In addition, **68% of VCOM's alumni** graduating across three campuses **have entered primary care residencies**.⁷ This bill will incentivize family medicine physicians who graduate from medical school in Alabama to practice in the state after completing residency training.

Alabama's current physician shortage:

- Currently, approximately **37% of Alabama's residents live in areas lacking sufficient primary care physicians**.⁸
- Additionally, **30% of Alabama's physicians are age 60 or older**.⁹
- **Alabama has one of the largest populations of older Americans of any state**, with 15% of the population aged 65 and over.¹⁰
- **Aging populations consume a disproportionately large portion of health care services**, which could exacerbate Alabama's current physician shortage.¹¹

In order to ensure that osteopathic medical students are able to take advantage of the Alabama Physician Incentive Program, the AOA and ALOMA respectfully request the following amendments:

1. Replace "college(s) of medicine" throughout the bill with "college(s) of medicine **or osteopathy**."
2. "(8) RESIDENT and RESIDENCY. Training or the title of the graduate medical education program of three or more years offered in a teaching hospital that is accredited by the American Council on Graduate Medical Education **or the American Osteopathic Association**."

Providing scholarships for family medicine physicians who agree to serve in rural and underserved areas is an excellent way to attract and retain physicians in the state. The AOA and ALOMA urge you to protect patient access to timely, high-quality care by **supporting SB 210**. Should you need any additional information, please

³ Osteopathic Medicine and Medical Education in Brief, American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine. Available at: <http://www.aacom.org/about/osteomed/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁴ National Center for the Analysis of Healthcare Data (NCAHD)'s Enhanced State Licensure. 2013.

⁵ <http://www.acomedu.org/about-acom/>.

⁶ https://www.acomedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ACOM_2017_Residency_Placement_Match_Results_FINAL_PDF.pdf.

⁷ <http://www.vcom.edu/handbooks/outcomes/#28>.

⁸ Taheri, Matthew. "Alabama plagued by physician shortage and overcrowded doctors' offices." *AL.com*, Sept. 29, 2016. Available at: http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/09/alabama_plagued_by_physician_s.html.

⁹ No author. "Alabama Physician Workforce Profile." *AAMC Center for Workforce Studies*, May 2, 2017. Available at: <https://www.aamc.org/download/447144/data/alabamaprofile.pdf>.

¹⁰ No author. "The Aging Physician Workforce: A Demographic Dilemma." *Merritt Hawkins*, 2014. Available at: https://www.merrithawkins.com/uploadedFiles/mhawhitepaper_aging.pdf.

¹¹ No author. "Montana Primary Care Needs Assessment." *Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services*, Mar. 13, 2017. Available at: <https://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/PrimaryCare/March2016PCNeedsAssessment.pdf>.

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feel free to contact Raine Richards, JD, Director of Public Policy at r-richards@osteopathic.org or (312)-202-8199.

Sincerely,



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