The Honorable Carole Johnson
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Administrator Johnson,

I am writing today to encourage action to increase the per resident allocation (PRA) within the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program to bolster the sustainability of the program. I have long been committed to ensuring reliable funding for the THCGME program. It is why I lead H.R. 2569, the Doctors of Community Act, which would permanently reauthorize the program with significant increases in funding, and why I also advocated for a seven-year reauthorization that the House passed as part of H.R. 5378, the Lower Costs, More Transparency Act last year.

The THCGME program addresses gaps in access to high-quality primary, mental, and dental health care by supporting the development of the next generation of physicians and dentists in underserved communities. This is the only federal program that trains physicians in a community setting rather than a hospital setting, and it has trained thousands of medical and dental residents across the country.

Since the program began in 2010, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has done an excellent job building the program. It created the Teaching Health Center Planning and Development program, which provides start-up grants to develop residency programs and funds a technical assistance center to support grantees. These grants help reduce the barriers that many health facilities in rural and underserved areas face around financing, governance, and faculty recruitment when establishing new residency programs. HRSA has provided $46.3 million in grants to 93 organizations across 36 states, including to a community
health center in my district in New Jersey.\textsuperscript{1} Over the last 14 years, the THCGME program has produced over 2,000 primary care physicians and dentists.\textsuperscript{2} Currently, there are 81 Teaching Health Centers in 24 states and the District of Columbia with 1,096 medical residents, and last year, these residents treated over 792,000 patients during more than 1.2 million patient encounters.\textsuperscript{3}

The THCGME program has an impressive record of attracting, training, and retaining physicians in underserved areas. It also helps to bridge physician shortages by attracting and retaining physicians in the areas that need them the most. Ninety-six percent of THCGME residents train in a rural or underserved area, and a national study of family physicians found that those who graduate from the THCGME program were 50 percent more likely to practice in rural areas and nearly twice as likely to practice in medically underserved areas compared to graduates of other family medicine programs.\textsuperscript{4} Evaluations of the program have also found that THCGME residents are more likely to receive training in key health services and to continue providing these services after their residencies, including behavioral health care, buprenorphine prescribing, HIV/hepatitis C care, outpatient gynecological procedures, and labor and delivery.\textsuperscript{5}

When the THCGME program was established over a decade ago, the PRA was determined to be $150,000. Since then, the PRA has only been increased once, by $10,000, when it was mandated in 2021 by the American Rescue Plan Act.\textsuperscript{6} While this increase is certainly helpful, a study commissioned by HRSA in 2022 found that the current PRA of $160,000 is $50,000 less than the national median for true training costs. This leaves Teaching Health Centers, which are predominantly federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics, responsible for covering the outstanding costs associated with training residents. I am concerned that the discrepancy between the PRA and the true costs of training a resident has the potential to threaten the viability of the THCGME program.

I appreciate the balance that needs to be struck between increasing resources for existing programs and onboarding new programs to allow for more residents to be trained in community-based settings. However, we have heard from Planning and Development grantees that the

\textsuperscript{1} THC Graduate Medical Education, \textit{Teaching Health Center Planning and Development Program: An Overview and Update} (Aug. 2023).
\textsuperscript{2} Health Resources & Services Administration, \textit{Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) Program} (www.bhw.hrsa.gov/funding/apply-grant/teaching-health-center-graduate-medical-education) (accessed May 6, 2024).
\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{4} Caitlin Smith Davis, MD, MSc, Tuhin Roy, MD, MPH, Lars E. Peterson, MD, PhD, Andrew W. Bazemore, MD, MPH, \textit{Evaluating the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education Model at 10 Years: Practice-Based Outcomes and Opportunities}, Journal of Graduate Medical Education (Oct. 14, 2022).
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Id.}
current PRA will not be sufficient for them to matriculate as Teaching Health Centers in the future.

In order to reassure existing and prospective Teaching Health Centers, I urge HRSA to raise the PRA by $10,000 before the new academic year begins on July 1, 2024. I believe the funding levels provided in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, as well as the authority granted to use additional unobligated funds from previous years, should allow HRSA to take this action while also permitting continued growth of the THCGME program. This would allow existing programs to recruit residents with greater confidence that they will have adequate funding for the length of their residencies and encourage grantees that new centers can be sustained.

I appreciate your attention to my concern about the sustainability of this important program. If you have any questions, please contact Lydia Abma of the Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-2927. I look forward to continuing to work together to support this program and the training of our medical and dental workforce.

Sincerely,

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member