

March 25, 2021

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
United States Senate
357 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Blackburn, Durbin, Murkowski, and Smith:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) writes to express support for the Rural America Health Corps Act (S.924).

The U.S. will need to hire 2.3 million new health care workers by 2025. An aging population, a rise in chronic diseases and increased behavioral health conditions contribute to the need to strategically support a workforce that can meet the demands of today and tomorrow. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated there is an urgent need for more capacity for health care workers to surge during a pandemic. During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals in certain parts of the country were filled with COVID-19 patients and there was strong demand for medical personnel to assist with triage, testing and patient care.

Health care workforce needs are particularly acute in rural areas. Recruitment and retention of health care professionals is an ongoing challenge and expense for rural hospitals. More than 60% of the health professional shortage areas (HPSA) are located in rural or partially rural areas.

Your Rural America Health Corps Act aims to reduce the shortage of medical providers in rural areas. This bipartisan legislation is well-designed to address these issues by establishing a Rural America Health Corps, modeled closely on the National Health Service Corps, to encourage health care professionals to serve in rural areas. It will provide incentives for clinicians to practice in rural areas and will help increase the supply of health care



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professionals at a critical time for our nation's health care workforce. The legislation would, among other provisions, authorize a Rural Provider Loan Repayment Demonstration Program in which participants would agree to serve full-time for five years in an HPSA that also is rural. Those who serve in this capacity would be eligible for \$200,000 in loan repayments.

We thank you for your leadership on behalf of the nation's health care workforce, and we look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/

Thomas P. Nickels
Executive Vice President