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**Written Testimony**

**Joint Legislative Hearing on Access to Care**  
**Pennsylvania House Professional Licensure Committee and**  
**House Health Committee**

**March 7, 2024**

## **Introduction**

The Pennsylvania Osteopathic Medical Association (POMA) submits these written comments to the Honorable members of the Professional Licensure Committee and Health Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in response to the joint committee legislative hearing on access to care in the Commonwealth.

There are shortages of healthcare providers across the board, throughout Pennsylvania and the country. Direct care workers, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, mental health counselors, physicians, dentists, and many others. Throughout the Commonwealth, healthcare teams work together to provide access to quality patient care. POMA represents Osteopathic physicians in Pennsylvania, or DOs, who are trained and educated to provide physician medical care in all specialties. POMA would like to share with the Committees the work Osteopathic physicians are doing in the state to train, educate and retain practicing high-quality Osteopathic physicians.

## **Osteopathic Medicine is National Leader in Pennsylvania and GROWING!**

The foundation of the Osteopathic approach is managing the full health of a patient, one that considers the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. This philosophy continues to guide all aspects of medical education and training for the nation's workforce of osteopathic physicians (DOs).

Pennsylvania is a national leader in educating and providing access to care, ranked third nationally with 11,117 practicing DOs. In 2023, more than half of the nation's DOs practice in the primary care specialties of family medicine, internal medicine, and pediatrics. ***The majority of DOs—62%—are under age 45***, demonstrating that primary care remains a desirable specialty for physicians entering the workforce.

## **Pennsylvania's Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs)**

POMA is home to three Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs), one in the southeast and two in western PA. The Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) is located in Philadelphia with branch campuses in the State of Georgia. PCOM has been around for more than a century, and has trained highly competent, caring physicians, and other health practitioners, who practice a "whole person" approach—treating people, not just symptoms.

The Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) is in Erie, Pennsylvania and has branch campuses at Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania and in the states of New York and Florida. Understanding the need for primary care physicians, LECOM introduced the Primary Care Scholars Program (PCSP) ensuring students receive three years of training that is the equivalent of four years of academic and clinical education whose focus is primary care. Additionally, LECOM offers certified physician assistants (PA-C) who are interested in expanding their education, and practicing independently, an accelerated pathway to earn a DO degree and license.

Duquesne University in Pittsburgh recently established a COM and is planning to enroll 85 students in its inaugural class in August 2024, with the plan to grow annual enrollment to 170 students per year beginning in 2026. Finally, there is discussion at Indiana University of Pennsylvania to develop a public College of Osteopathic Medicine in the Pennsylvania State-System of colleges and universities.

### **Physician Residency Slots Increase**

Physicians, both DOs and MDs, after college graduation, receive 4 years of preclinical and clinical training to earn their medical degree, then at least an additional 3 years of residency training, before practicing independently. POMA believes this comprehensive medical training provides the skills necessary to lead the patient care team for the best interests of our patients. Increasing residency slots will increase the number of practicing physicians to provide the best care for our patients.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the federal government recently established policies to implement 1,000 new Medicare-funded physician residency slots, 200 slots per year over five years. In 2023, the first 200 residency slots were allocated to teaching hospitals in Health Professional Shortage Areas with 125 residency slots allocated for primary care and 20 slots allocated for psychiatry. Pennsylvania received 30 new residency slots through the allocation. It is also important to keep in mind that while in residency programs, resident physicians are also providing access to care while they train under the direction of an oversight physician. However, more policies like this are needed because they will increase physician supply.

### **Team Care Model**

POMA believes that the team-based care model serves the best interests of patients. In this model, it's not the CRNP, RN, CNM, or the physician that is at the center. The **patient** is at the center of this model and the entire team works collaboratively to ensure the best quality care is provided. POMA further believes that physicians, who are the most educated and trained, lead the healthcare team. In terms of other healthcare providers who are permitted to make acts of medical diagnoses and prescribe, POMA believes they should do so only when working with a practicing physician. Healthcare teams led by physicians provide the safest and most comprehensive level of care to each patient.

### **Conclusion**

It is POMA's hope that this written testimony has provided facts that support the leadership role Osteopathic medicine is taking towards providing access to quality physician care. If you have any questions or concerns POMA can help you with, please contact POMA staff member, Andy Sandusky at [asandusky@poma.org](mailto:asandusky@poma.org).