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November 15, 2019

The Honorable Brian Schatz
U.S. Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
U.S. Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Schatz and Barrasso:

On behalf of the more than 80,000 members of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), I write in support of the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act*, S. 2859. This important legislation would direct the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), to conduct a study on general surgery workforce shortage areas. Additionally, it would grant the Secretary the authority to provide a general surgery shortage area designation.

Increasing evidence indicates a current and growing shortage of surgeons available to serve our nation's population. A shortage of general surgeons is a critical component of the overall crisis in health care workforce. The ACS believes that Congress should recognize that only surgeons are uniquely trained and qualified to provide certain necessary, lifesaving procedures and are therefore an essential component of a community-based health care system. The designation of formal surgical shortage areas is an important first step in achieving this goal.

HRSA has never designated a shortage area solely based upon a shortage of surgical services. The ACS believes that more accurate and actionable research and data is necessary to determine exactly what constitutes a surgical shortage area and where these areas exist. Identifying where patients lack access to surgical services will provide HRSA with valuable new information to increase access to the full spectrum of high-quality health care services. Determining what constitutes and defines a surgical shortage area is an important first step in guaranteeing that all Medicare beneficiaries, regardless of geographic location, have access to quality surgical care.

The ACS strongly supports the *Ensuring Access to General Surgery Act* and believes that determining what constitutes and defines a surgical shortage area is an important first step in ensuring access to high quality surgical care. Thank you for your efforts and continued leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

David B. Hoyt, MD, FACS
Executive Director

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