



June 6, 2022

The Honorable Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner of Health  
New York State Department of Health  
Corning Tower  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, NY | 12237

Dear Commissioner Bassett,

On behalf of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), the New York Chapter of the ACS, and the Eastern Long Island Chapter of the ACS, we would like to express our sincere gratitude for the \$20 billion, multi-year healthcare investment in the fiscal year 2023 state budget. The \$1.2 billion dedicated to bonuses for frontline healthcare professionals is a tremendous effort and provides much needed support to those who have been fighting on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the healthcare bonus program is inclusive of a wide range of practitioners, most notably absent from the list of qualified participants are physician residents whom have equally sacrificed to care for New York's patients during the pandemic. We strongly believe that physician surgical residents should be included in this valuable program.

New York, specifically New York City, was the first epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Due to the lack of national preparedness and pandemic response, states and healthcare systems across the nation were left to ration resources and call upon physicians to work extreme hours often outside of their specialty and at the expense of their mental and physical well-being. Physician residents – and even medical students – were not immune to the direct impact of workforce shortages. Large numbers of medical students graduated early. Attending physicians had less time to dedicate to resident training and lectures, and many physician residents were pulled from their specialty areas to help support COVID-19 patients.

Several studies regarding the impact of COVID-19 on physician residents were recently published. One study that surveyed medical students from Columbia University, State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate, New York University, and Cornell, found that 59% of participants claimed that COVID-19 influenced their choice of residency and specialty. Several participants also reported a change in their top residency choice during the pandemic, citing concerns related to frontline work, work-life balance, and risk of harm. Another study of physician residents from across the world found that the majority of respondents stated the COVID-19 pandemic had a mostly negative effect on professional satisfaction (59.9%), quality of work (62.8%), their personal lives (44.7%), and overall quality of life (57.1%).

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The United States was experiencing a physician shortage prior to the pandemic, and while ACS is working to address the national distribution of surgical care, we believe that efforts to retain talent by the state will have significant influence on future access to care. According to the New York Physician Workforce Profile published by the American Association of Medical Colleges in 2018, there are over 17,000 resident physicians in New York. The base salary for physician residents in New York ranges from \$59,280 to \$74,179 with an average base salary of \$66,548. One in four medical students have graduated with training-related debt that exceeds \$200,000 and over half of graduates reported debt of more than \$150,000.

Healthcare bonuses for physician residents will not only provide financial aid to student loan debt and basic living necessities, but they can make a powerful statement that (1) New York supports the next generation of physician leaders and (2) medical students across the country should consider a residency at one of the many top ranking healthcare systems in the state.

We urge the Commissioner of Health to include physician residents in the frontline healthcare worker bonus program.

Sincerely,



Patricia L. Turner, MD, MBA, FACS  
Executive Director  
American College of Surgeons



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