



September 14, 2021

Honorable Chairman Richard Neal
House Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

CC: Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

Letter of Support for the Pathway to Practice Training Program

Dear Chairman Neal,

We are writing to express our support for the Rural and Underserved Pathway to Practice Training Programs detailed in Section VI of the House Ways and Means Budget Reconciliation Legislative Recommendations. The Beyond Flexner Alliance (BFA) is a national movement dedicated to advancing the social mission of health professions schools, broadly defined as the contribution of a school in its mission, programs, and the performance of its graduates, faculty, and leadership to enhancing health equity and addressing the health disparities of the society in which it exists. We strongly support the proposed Pathways to Practice Training Programs because it addresses the nation's current workforce shortages and aims to alleviate barriers faced by historically marginalized communities in accessing healthcare and medical education.

There have been ongoing challenges with the sufficiency of the health workforce in high need areas, including primary care, mental health, and in rural and underserved communities. An estimated 84 million people live in Primary Care [Health Professions Shortage Areas \(HPSAs\)](#) and 129 million live in Mental Health HPSAs. While nearly 20 percent of the US population live in rural areas, [only 8 percent of active physicians](#) are located in rural areas. Diversity of the health workforce also remains an ongoing challenge. Recent data from the [George Washington University Mullan Institute's Health Workforce Diversity Tracker](#) show that among 10 health care professions, Black, Hispanic, and Native American people were underrepresented compared with their representation in the general population. The lack of adequate representation of historically marginalized communities in the health workforce significantly compromises the access and quality of health care delivery in these communities. COVID-19 has only deepened health disparities among communities of color, highlighting the pressing need for diversity and equity of opportunity in the health workforce.

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Data shows that individual and training factors influence how and where health care providers practice. Individuals from [underrepresented minority, rural, and urban underserved backgrounds](#) are more likely to practice in underserved rural or urban areas. Family medicine physicians are likely to remain [close to their graduate medical education training site](#). Furthermore, [community-based training](#) is more likely to produce physicians who will practice in community health centers, meeting a critical health workforce need in the US.

Cost of medical education and availability of community-based residency programs remain as significant barriers to addressing the aforementioned health workforce challenges. Programs, such as the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program, have been successful in expanding health care access in underserved and rural communities. Expansion of these models with a focus on students from disadvantaged backgrounds are important to advance access, quality, and equity in healthcare while also addressing needed equity of opportunity within the health workforce. The Beyond Flexner Alliance supports the Pathways to Practice Training Program as an important step towards addressing our nation's pressing health workforce needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Toyese Oyeyemi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Toyese Oyeyemi
Executive Director, Beyond Flexner Alliance