

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2022

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Tabak,

Thank you for your commitment to improving the health of the American people through medical research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). As members of Congress, we know that Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs) are integral to our nation's supply of physicians and our research capacity.

In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L 117-103), Congress acknowledged that increased funding for research within osteopathic medicine would significantly boost NIH's capacity to support our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased NIH capacity within osteopathic medicine would help to address health disparities in rural and medically underserved populations and advance research in primary care, prevention, and treatment. We write to request that the NIH prioritize funding opportunities for research in osteopathic medicine.

We are concerned by the historic disparity in NIH funding and representation for COMs. Osteopathic medicine is the fastest growing medical field in the country, according to the U.S. Bureau of Health Professions. Additionally, the 38 COMs nationwide currently educate nearly 34,000 physicians – 25 percent of all U.S. medical students. Nonetheless, osteopathic medical schools are underfunded by NIH, receiving only 0.1 percent of NIH grants compared to 40 percent for allopathic schools. Furthermore, there are no doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs) among the 3,233 study section reviewers at the NIH and only one DO among the 462 National Advisory Council members. If these disparities in funding and representation continue, NIH will miss key opportunities to address some of the nation's most pressing health threats.

COMs are committed to serving rural and underserved communities. Fifty-eight percent of DOs are located in Health Professional Shortage Areas, and nearly 40 percent of physicians who practice in medically underserved areas are DOs. These doctors serve as the backbone of the primary care system, with more than half of them practicing in primary care specialties. COMs routinely train osteopathic medical students in community-based settings, in alignment with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Initiative to Strengthen Primary Health Care.

Osteopathic physicians offer a unique voice and perspective in the medical community. DOs have expertise in the musculoskeletal system and receive additional training in osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT), a hands-on technique and non-pharmacological solution to pain management. NIH is strongly encouraged to increase research into this treatment as a non-addictive alternative to opioids.

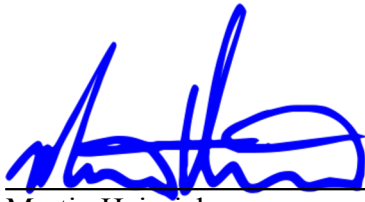
As NIH seeks to address the disparities identified by Congress and expand research funding and representation for COMs, we urge NIH to take the following additional steps:

1. Establish a structured partnership with the osteopathic medical education community, including the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM), which creates and executes a plan to increase NIH funding for COMs.

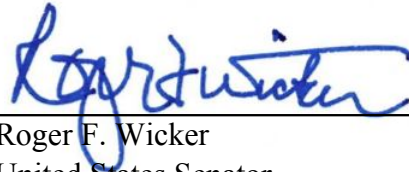
2. Establish a program to incentivize principal investigators from COMs.
3. Consider opportunities to fund research projects that incorporate the osteopathic philosophy and OMT.
4. Increase representation for the osteopathic profession on NIH National Advisory Councils and study selection reviewers.

We encourage you and NIH leadership to meet with relevant stakeholders to discuss the issues outlined in this letter. We thank you for your attention to this important matter and look forward to learning more about your efforts to advance funding and representation opportunities for osteopathic medicine.

Sincerely,



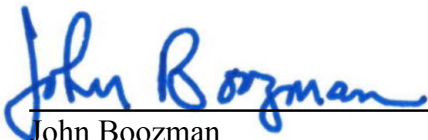
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



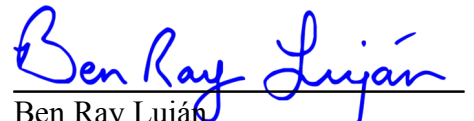
Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



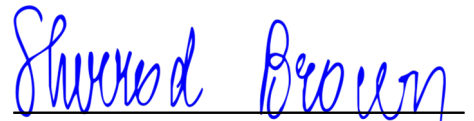
John Boozman
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



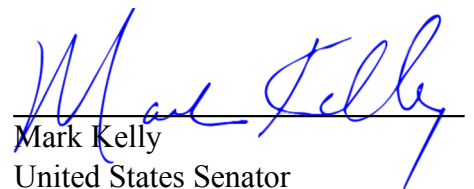
Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



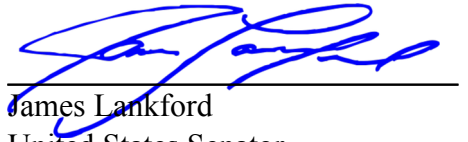
Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



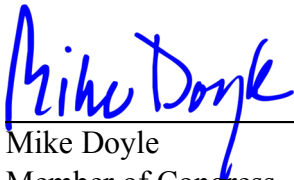
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



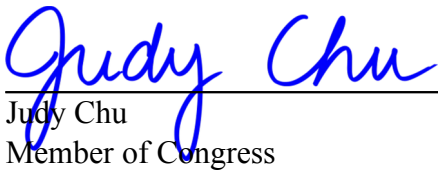
James Lankford
United States Senator



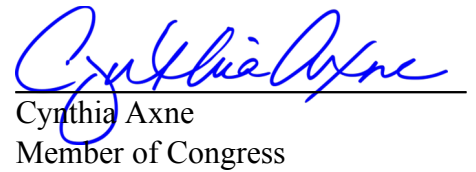
Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



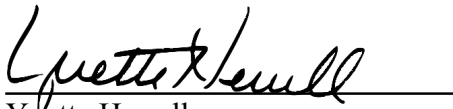
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Cynthia Axne
Member of Congress



Yvette Herrell
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



David Rouzer
Member of Congress



Ben Cline
Member of Congress



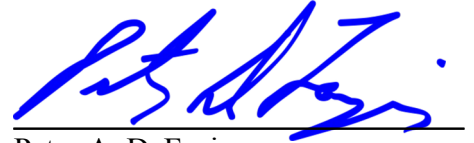
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Mike Rogers
Member of Congress



William R. Timmons IV
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Frank D. Lucas
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Andy Kim
Member of Congress