



March 26, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the more than 100,000 nationally-certified physician assistants (PAs) represented by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), I followed with great interest the Committee's recent hearing on "America's Health IT Transformation: Translating the Promise of Electronic Health Records Into Better Care." AAPA appreciates the Committee's interest in addressing some of the concerns which have been raised by healthcare providers attempting to use EHRs in a meaningful way, and we would like to share with you a related challenge that has proven to be harmful to PAs and their patients.

The use of EHRs has a significant impact on patient outcomes, and this impact will only continue to grow as more providers adopt EHR systems and expand their use. Like physicians and nurse practitioners (NPs), PAs are heavy users of EHR systems across virtually all medical settings and specialties. In fact, in many rural or medically-underserved areas, PAs may be the sole healthcare provider. However, the HITECH Act excluded the majority of PAs from the Medicaid EHR incentive, essentially penalizing medical practices and clinics in which PAs provide a high volume of care. This implicit penalty creates two undesirable results: a financial disincentive for Medicaid-heavy practices and clinics to hire and retain PAs, and a decrease in access to this technology for some of the nation's most vulnerable patients.

We are grateful that in the U.S. House of Representatives, Representative Karen Bass (D-CA) has introduced H.R. 1345, the Health IT Modernization for Underserved Communities Act. This bill would extend the Medicaid EHR incentive to all PAs with patient volumes that include at least 30% Medicaid patients and ensure that these beneficiaries – particularly those who reside in rural or medically-underserved areas – have access to quality, efficient healthcare. We are hopeful that H.R. 1345 will continue to gain momentum. As the Committee continues to explore potential changes to the laws surrounding EHRs and meaningful use, *we strongly urge you to consider similar language to add PAs to the incentive program.*

AAPA applauds the creation of the Senate workgroup that Senators Whitehouse and Alexander agreed to create to tackle problems with EHR interoperability, the meaningful use program, and usability. AAPA looks forward to serving as a resource to the workgroup. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Sandy Harding, senior director of federal advocacy, at sharding@aapa.org or 571-319-4338.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer L. Dorn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer L. Dorn
Chief Executive Officer