

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
U.S. Senate
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Rosen and Wicker:

On behalf of the more than 84,000 members of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), I would like to express our strong support for the *Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act* (S. 705). This important legislation would help ease the specialty physician workforce shortage facing the United States, particularly rural America, by establishing a new loan repayment program designed specifically for specialty physicians. Specialists, who participate, agree to practice in a rural area for six years and will have up to \$250,000 of their student loans forgiven.

General surgery is an essential element in the care of a community or region. In areas without general surgeons or with an insufficient surgical workforce, patients in need of care must travel to a place with surgical capabilities, leading to delays in care and potentially suboptimal outcomes. A Congressionally mandated [2020 report](#) conducted by the Health Resources and Services Administration found a maldistribution of the surgical workforce, with widespread and critical shortages of general surgeons particularly in rural areas. A shortage of general surgeons is a key component of the crisis in the health care workforce and patient access to health care services because surgeons are the only physicians who are uniquely trained and qualified to provide certain necessary, lifesaving procedures.

The high cost of medical education contributes to the physician shortage. Physicians often accumulate immense student debt during their education, and then must undertake several years of residency training with low pay. This financial burden poses a barrier for students wishing to pursue certain specialties, or practice in underserved areas. The *SPARC Act* will address this barrier and help patients access the care they need.

Thank you for your efforts and leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you to ensure enactment of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Patricia L. Turner, MD, MBA, FACS
Executive Director & CEO

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