Letter to Legislators

As a constituent and an infectious diseases health care professional, I urge you to address the infectious diseases and HIV workforce shortage, that is challenging responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by cosponsoring the Student Lan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act (H.R. 6720).

An expert workforce, including infectious diseases and HIV physicians and other health care professionals, is a central component to our pandemic preparedness. Infectious diseases and HIV physicians manage care for patients with COVID-19 in both inpatient and outpatient settings, lead infection prevention and control programs at health care facilities, and work with public health administrators and stakeholders to lead preparedness and response efforts in local communities. Alarmingly, according to [*a study published June 4 in the Annals of Internal Medicine*](https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-2684) approximately 208 million individuals in the United States live in a county with no or below-average access to an infectious diseases physician. The study also noted that among the 785 counties with the highest COVID-19 disease burden 588 counties have no ID physicians. Additionally, 80% of counties in 14 southern states do not have an experienced HIV clinician with the disparities being greatest in rural areas.[[1]](#endnote-1) Management by an experienced HIV clinician improves health outcomes for people with HIV and lowers treatment costs.

Due to high medical student loan debt and lower compensation for infectious diseases specialists, the numbers of physicians pursuing training in infectious diseases has declined. H.R. 6720 would forgive federal and private student loans for doctors, medical students, residents, interns and fellows, medical researchers, laboratory workers, nurses, and other health care professionals who provide COVID-related health care services.

Fortifying the infectious diseases and HIV workforce is paramount to ensuring patients with COVID have access to lifesaving expertise. Please co-sponsor H.R. 6720 to invest in infectious diseases and HIV physicians and other health care workers on the frontlines of this pandemic and help ensure the United States is fully prepared for future public health emergencies.

Sincerely,

1. Bono RS, et al. HIV-Experienced Clinician Workforce Capacity: Urban-Rural Disparities in the US South. Clin Infect Dis. Mar 25, 2020. doi: 10.1093/cid/ciaa300. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)