

Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee
Regarding: House Bill 64's Proposal to Cut Graduate Medical Education Funding

Presented by Diana Wieser
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Chair Oelslager, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee: My name is Diana Wieser, and I am a fourth year medical student at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. I am also Chair of the Ohio State Medical Association's (OSMA's) Medical Student Section. On behalf of the OSMA, and specifically on behalf of our medical students and residents, I am here to talk to you about the benefits our state gets from funding graduate medical education as well as the potential consequences we could face if this funding is cut.

As a fourth year medical student, I have already completed four years of college and three years of medical school, and I still have three to seven years of residency training ahead of me before I can practice medicine by myself. Residency training – sometimes called graduate medical education, or GME – is absolutely essential to my future. As you may know, resident physicians serve as apprentices to supervising physicians and are given progressive responsibilities. By the end of my residency training, I will take care of patients while supervising medical students and junior residents. After completing a residency, I will be able to become a board-certified physician who can practice medicine independently.

As a resident, I will be part of the workforce that provides a significant portion of the population's charity care. Teaching hospitals that train residents take care of a disproportionately large share of patients who lack health insurance and have Medicaid coverage. While in residency, I will staff community clinics and provide direct care to these and other patients. Since residents play such a vital role in patient care, cutting GME funding could threaten our teaching hospitals' capacity to provide adequate services in their communities.

Cutting GME could also threaten our state's ability to produce a sufficient number of physicians to take care of our population. Today, more than 1 million Ohioans live in a health professional shortage area and have trouble accessing care. This shortage will only worsen as Ohio's aging physicians – 25% of whom are over the age of 60 – plan to retire in the coming years. Experts say our country could face a shortage of 90,000 physicians by 2025.

About a decade ago, medical schools – including those in Ohio – began increasing enrollment to head off the looming physician shortage. These efforts have been successful, and our state now has increased medical school enrollment by about 16% in recent years. Simultaneous efforts to increase residency slots have not been as successful since federal and state funding for GME has been stagnant. We now have many more medical students, but these students are having difficulty finding places to complete their residency training.

This year, nearly two thousand U.S. medical students failed find a residency spot. Imagine going through four years of medical school and not being able to take the next step toward becoming a practicing physician. To my classmates and me, that thought is terrifying. At a time when we really need more residency slots in Ohio to prevent a drastic physician shortage, it does not make sense to take away state funding for GME.

I believe our state's current funding for GME recognizes the role that residents and teaching hospitals play in serving our communities and shows we value training future physicians. My classmates and I are very concerned about this budget's proposal to cut \$25 million from our commitment to these goals.

If the state cuts GME funding, we will almost certainly will lose some of our residency spots, which means we will lose some of our capacity to care for patients now and in the future. Some nearby states, including Illinois and Virginia, are actually increasing their funding for GME. To me, our state's proposed cuts take us in the wrong direction.

My medical school colleagues and I want to have the opportunity to train here, and we want treat Ohioans. As a medical student, I've done everything from hold back tears as a patient with AIDS went brain dead right before my eyes, to feeling incredible joy as I delivered a baby with my own two hands. Please give medical students like me the chance to provide compassionate care Ohioans by preserving our state's current funding levels for GME. I urge you to reverse the \$25 million cut to make sure we can take care of our population.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.