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The mission of ADEA is to lead and support the health professions community in preparing future-ready oral health professionals.

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December 10, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) represents all 68 U.S. dental schools, more than 1,000 allied and advanced dental education programs, over 60 corporate partners and more than 20,000 individuals. On behalf of our members I appreciate your attention to the continuing needs and demands of preparing oral health professionals to provide the necessary high-quality care to a U.S. population that is growing older and more culturally diverse.

Academic dental institutions are an important part of the health care safety net. Every dental school operates a dental clinic—in 2018-2019, dental care was provided during the 2.5 million patient visits to these clinics, at little to no out-of-pocket costs for patients. Additionally, our dental and allied dental students, residents and faculty work in community health clinics, on mobile vans and in elementary school-based programs where children and adults are provided much-needed dental care to those with limited access to care.

The dental programs in Title VII, funded under the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), provide critical funding for education and training in allied dental and general, pediatric and public health dentistry, helping to make this safety net possible as well as ensuring an adequately prepared and culturally competent dental workforce. This funding also provides support to schools that receive Dental Faculty Loan Repayment Program (DFLRP) assistance to those choosing an academic career in dentistry or dental hygiene. The DFLRP is an important incentive for faculty recruitment as there are 265 vacant funded full-time faculty positions.

HRSA's Oral Health Training programs are currently funded at \$40,700,000. The investment made by Title VII not only educates dental and allied dental professionals, but expands access to care for underserved areas in community-based settings located in one of the 6,813 Dental Health Profession Shortage Areas (HPSA) in the country. Fifty-seven million Americans live in those shortage areas. Title VII funding levels have been relatively flat for the last two years while the number of Dental HPSAs has increased.

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The House bill authorizing Title VII programs, H.R. 2781, the EMPOWER for Health Act, increases the program level by 5% in fiscal year 2020 and freezes support at that level—\$42,707,000—for five years. We believe that because the cost of the education, training and patient care has not been and will not be stagnant, the funding level should increase rather than remain as is. ADEA therefore requests that you consider including an incremental increase in the annual authorized level, such as at the medical inflation rate or some other multiplier.

HRSA estimates the number of dentists will increase 6% by 2025, nearly the life span of this authorization legislation, but the demand for dental services will increase by 10% during the same period. This means we are in danger of further exacerbating the growing dental workforce shortfall, leaving millions of Americans with little to no access to oral health care. The 2000 *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General* states that “oral health is integral to general health. You cannot be healthy without oral health.”

We look forward to working with you and your staff to address the near- and long-term needs of underrepresented and underserved populations in need of quality, accessible and timely dental care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen P. West".

Karen P. West, D.M.D., M.P.H.
President and CEO