

February 16, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Health Care Workforce Shortages – Palliative Care

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

The undersigned members of the Patient Quality of Life Coalition (PQLC) write to thank you for prioritizing health care workforce shortages as the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee begins the 118th Congress. As the Committee considers testimony during the hearing “Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do We Go From Here?” and works to address workforce shortages, we respectfully request your consideration of the *Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act* (PCHETA). This bipartisan legislation was introduced by Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Shelley Moore Capito as [S. 4260](#) in the 117th Congress and seeks to address interdisciplinary workforce shortages for the care of patients with serious illness.

The PQLC was established to advance the interests of patients and families facing serious illness. The coalition includes over 40 organizations dedicated to improving quality of care and quality of life for all patients from pediatrics to geriatrics, as well as supporting public policies that improve and expand access to quality palliative care and appropriate pain management. PQLC members represent patients, caregivers, health professionals, and health care systems.

There is a significant [gap](#) between the number of health professionals with palliative care training and the number required to meet the needs of the expanding population of patients with serious illness throughout the continuum of care. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the palliative care workforce shortage and amplified the need for our nation’s health care workforce – beyond those who will specialize in the field – to have training in basic palliative care to ensure all patients, including those facing serious illness or at the end of life, receive high-quality care.

Palliative care is specialized care that focuses on preventing and treating the debilitating effects of serious illness throughout the continuum of care, with clinicians trained to assess and manage physical, psychological, and other sources of suffering. This includes relieving pain and other distressing symptoms, such as shortness of breath or unrelenting nausea. Palliative care seeks to anticipate, prevent, and treat physical, emotional, social, and spiritual suffering, as well as to help facilitate and support the goals and values of patients. This education is also important for the health professionals who do not have palliative care training but directly care for patients with serious illness. Dr. Sean Morrison of the Icahn School of

Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York previously [testified](#) in support of PCHETA before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. A goal of any future workforce development legislation should be to support and train health care workers and improve patient care.

The *Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act* (PCHETA) would address the palliative care workforce shortage and help respond to pressing issues including appropriate pain management and pandemic preparedness. PCHETA will work to address the critical shortage of health professionals with knowledge and skills in palliative care, build the evidence base for serious illness care, and educate all who care for patients. PCHETA will not only help strengthen the palliative care workforce but also help ensure that, going forward, patients and providers are aware of the benefits of palliative care so that patients can receive palliative care as appropriate. According to the Institute of Medicine, there is a “need for better understanding of the role of palliative care among both the public and professionals across the continuum of care.”

Congress has long worked on a bipartisan basis to support and advance PCHETA. The House has twice passed it with overwhelming support. PCHETA is [supported](#) by more than 60 national and state organizations. We urge you to ensure that all Americans facing serious illness have access to palliative care and to support the development of needed training programs in this area for our health care professionals.

As Congress considers measures to improve our nation’s workforce development, our organizations welcome the opportunity to discuss our views with you. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel E. Smith, coalition manager for the PQLC at dan.smith@advocacysmiths.com.

Sincerely,

Alzheimer's Association
Alzheimer's Impact Movement
American Academy of Hospice and Palliative
Medicine
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
Association for Clinical Oncology
Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology
Nurses
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Center to Advance Palliative Care
Children's National Hospital

CSU Shiley Haynes Institute for Palliative Care
GO2 for Lung Cancer
Hospice Action Network
Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association
Motion Picture & Television Fund
National Coalition for Hospice and Palliative Care
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
National Palliative Care Research Center
Oncology Nursing Society
PAs in Hospice and Palliative Medicine
Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition
St. Baldrick’s Foundation