

March 20, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
& Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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

**RE: Request for Input on Healthcare Workforce Shortages**

Dear Chair Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of 141 accredited schools and programs of public health, members of our association, we are pleased to provide comments on the Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee's request for input on the nation's healthcare workforce shortage issue. The Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) applauds your leadership to better understand root causes of current healthcare workforce shortages and explore potential legislative avenues to ultimately strengthen our healthcare system and ensure better health for Americans.

We urge you to consider shortages in our frontline public health workforce as a crucial aspect of any legislative proposal the Committee moves forward. COVID-19 exacerbated the realities of the current public health workforce which remains under-resourced, underfunded, and siloed from other healthcare providers for far too many years, leaving it to be under-prioritized in discussions of the healthcare workforce. Often invisible during the pandemic, public health workers were instrumental in efforts to mitigate the deleterious effects of COVID-19 via contact tracing, surveillance, managing and leading vaccine efforts, providing data in real-time to understand requirements for infectious disease control, modeling and forecasting as the pandemic unfolded for evidence-based decision making. Shortages in the current healthcare workforce, which includes public health workers, has led to experiences of persistent attrition, burnout, and documented cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A sense of urgency in preparation for the next public health crisis requires bold action to reverse the negative repercussions of historically overlooking and underfunding the public health workforce .

Academic public health plays a critical role in addressing the workforce needs of the future. Our member institutions are training the next generation of the public health workforce and ASPPH has recently launched a [Center for Public Health Workforce Development](#) to address this critical need. Schools and programs of public health also played a critical role in combating COVID-19 in communities all over the country. We have documented this impact through our [COVID-19 Storytelling Project](#), which provides examples of the critical on-the-ground work these institutions did during the pandemic. We urge the Committee to recognize the need for academic

partnerships as we seek to develop the necessary workforce to address the future public health needs of the country.

ASPPH commends the Committee's role in advancing the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program (PHLRP) under the *PREVENT Pandemics Act* and *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023*. This program is critical to provide recruitment incentives which ensure properly trained public health graduates are placed in state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments, especially in times of need. While Congress reauthorized the PHLRP last year, the federal government must also fund the authorized \$100 million for this program to ensure enough professionals with the right credentials enter this workforce and are placed in high-need areas.

The lack of data on the public health workforce and the occupations within it continues to be a challenge to justify more funding being provided to hire people for this workforce. The US Department of Labor (DOL) Bureau of Labor Statistics is not currently contributing to enumerating the number of public health workers our nation has in local, state, and Tribal government health departments. We encourage directing DOL, working in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), other federal agencies, and public health stakeholders including ASPPH, to address the gaps in data necessary to provide and sustain funding for critical public health education, training, and workforce programs.

ASPPH was also happy to see the introduction of the *Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act* (PHISLA) in the last Congress. This bill provides annual funding for the CDC to strengthen core public health infrastructure, including elements of workforce capabilities that enable health departments to perform essential functions. We urge the inclusion of PHISLA in any legislative proposal that moves forward by the Committee.

ASPPH is grateful for the opportunity to work with your committee on addressing healthcare workforce shortages. We want to work with you to support the development and advancement of relevant legislation that includes public health workforce development. Please contact me ([tleshan@aspvh.org](mailto:tleshan@aspvh.org) 202-296-1099 ext. 132) if we can provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Timothy E. Leshan, MPA  
Chief External Relations & Advocacy Officer  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health