

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Leads bipartisan effort to support physician training programs in rural communities

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As COVID-19 cases continue to rise throughout the nation, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) is leading a bipartisan group of Senators, including Senators John Barrasso (R-WY), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Michael Rounds (R-SD) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), in calling on the Trump administration to support physician training programs in rural communities to strengthen and maintain a physician workforce for the future, especially in rural areas.

Rural hospitals are facing difficult financial decisions as a result of the pandemic, and may be forced to decrease or eliminate training and residency programs due to the additional costs. In a letter from the bipartisan group of Senators to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, the Senators request the administration release approximately \$100 million in targeted funding from the Provider Relief Fund established in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to fund rural hospitals that train physicians and commit to maintaining training programs for at least three years.

**Baldwin and her colleagues write,** *“While HHS has taken important steps to shore up the health care system, rural physician training is at risk. Rural hospitals have been significantly impacted by revenue losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and without federal action, we are concerned that some may be forced to discontinue their physician training programs to remain open.”*

**They continue,** *“We urge you to commit immediate resources from the Provider Relief Fund to rural hospitals that maintain their current residency training programs. This will help rural hospitals currently training residents who are likely to go into rural practice, often near their training site, and who supply a significant portion of the future workforce serving those hospitals. The proposed, targeted payment is not a substitute GME payment, but rather an incentive payment to a rural hospital that commits to maintaining its current training program. The payment would be determined by the number of resident positions; however, it is not a payment for residency education. A rural hospital which serves as the primary location of training of greater than 50% of residents’ time, would receive the bonus payments upon agreeing to maintain its training program(s) for the next three academic years.”*

**Baldwin and her colleagues conclude,** *“As you continue to address the financial needs of the provider community, we request that you include support for the physician training pipeline in rural America. This action will help provide needed care to patients during this emergency, and help maintain a physician workforce for the future.”*

“To ensure we have a strong rural healthcare infrastructure, we must invest in training opportunities for clinicians, advanced practice nurses and all allied health professionals in rural settings. The data demonstrates that if a candidate has had the chance to train in a rural setting they are much more likely to consider working in smaller communities. A recent analysis found 93% of final-year medical residents say they would prefer to practice in communities of 50,000 people or more, compared to just 3% looking for communities of 25,000 or less. If we are to change these numbers, we have to do better in training physicians where they are needed most. It is integral for the rural healthcare system, and for the economic vitality of smaller communities across our country. Senator Baldwin and her colleagues should be applauded for their determination to make a difference for rural communities nationwide,” **said Dr. Matthew Jansen, Director of Education for the Marshfield Clinic Health System, Associate Dean for the Marshfield Clinic Health System/Northern Academic Campus of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.**

“We commend Senator Baldwin for her leadership on the crucial issue of rural physician training. Rural areas in Wisconsin have been particularly hard hit by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal support to ensure a robust professional workforce of rural physicians is a critical step in recovery. We look forward to working alongside the Senator and continuing our commitment in this area,” **said Robert N. Golden, Dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.**