



Growing Crisis in the Clinical Laboratory Workforce

Position

To ensure access to quality health care services the healthcare system must have an adequate supply of clinical laboratory personnel. Today the supply is already seriously short of what is needed and estimated to become critical. This shortage hampers the ability of clinical laboratories to meet the growing need for appropriate testing, impeding the ability of clinicians to diagnose and treat patients. An ever-increasing patient population and the number and complexity of medical laboratory tests are putting strains on a profession whose numbers are barely growing.

We call upon Congress to address this concern and urge support of legislation that will:

- **Establish a program of scholarships and loan repayment to alleviate shortages of clinical laboratory scientists and other allied health professionals. The scholarship and loan repayment program shall include a period of obligated service for recipients in a designated health professional shortage area.**
- **Establish a demonstration program to improve access to clinical education opportunities for allied health professionals under which an eligible hospital may receive payment for reasonable costs associated with the provision of qualified clinical training for clinical laboratory scientists and other allied health professionals.**
- **Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to identify which allied health occupations are in significant shortage on an annual basis.**

Rationale

The Bureau of Labor statistics anticipates needed growth of 12,000 new medical laboratory professionals per year to meet growing demand. However, academic programs produced just 6,300 graduates in 2017; a number that has not grown in the last five years.

In 2018, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) listed Medical Technologist (clinical laboratory personnel) as one of the five largest critical need occupations for the system. Without action, this shortage will continue to grow.

This crisis is the result of a decades-long decline in MLS and MLT producing academic programs. From 1970 the number of accredited programs declined from nearly 1,000 to less than 450 in 2006. Since 2008, the number of programs has rebounded modestly from 427 to 478 in 2017. That increase has not been nearly enough to address the increasing demand, and the shortage exacerbates the challenge in securing clinical sites for training.

Clinical laboratory personnel is critical to our nation's health care. They provide a wide range of diagnostic, technical, therapeutic and direct patient care and support services. These professionals are critical to physicians and nurses with whom they work and to the patients they serve. In total, clinical laboratory personnel and other allied health professions account for an estimated 60 percent of the entire health care workforce.

More than 4 billion medical laboratory tests are performed each year in the United States, the single highest volume medical activity. Laboratory test data influence approximately 70 percent of physicians' patient interactions.

Due to the sequencing of the human genome and a focus on precision medicine, new laboratory tests are being continuously developed to improve early detection and diagnosis of diseases, more accurately monitor conditions and better protect outcomes. Molecular diagnostics detect and measure the presence of genetic material or proteins associated with specific health conditions or diseases, helping to uncover the underlying mechanisms of disease and enabling clinicians to take care at an individual level, facilitating the practice of "personalized medicine."

<p>On Behalf of ASCLS Patrick Cooney (202) 347-0034 x101 Patrick@federalgrp.com</p>	<p>On Behalf of CLMA Mike Hiltunen m.hiltunen@charter.net (616) 499-2944</p>
<p>On Behalf of AMT Michael McCarty Office: (202) 243-7842 Mobile: (703) 727-3776 michael@mccarty-legal.com</p>	<p>On Behalf of NSH Sharon H. Kneebone, CAE, IOM Executive Director (443) 535-4062 sharon@nsh.org</p>
<p>On Behalf of ASCP Matthew Schultz (202) 403-1110 x2285 Matthew.Schulze@ascp.org</p>	