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Representative Frank Burns, *Chairman*
Representative Carl Walker Metzgar, *Chairman*
House Professional Licensure Committee
501 N. 3rd Street,
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Representative Dan Frankel, *Chairman*
Representative Kathy L. Rapp, *Chairman*
House Health Committee
501 N. 3rd Street,
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Thank you, Chairman Burns and Metzgar and Chairman Frankel and Rapp and also to the members of the House Professional Licensure Committee and House Health Committee for having me here today. My name is Dr. David Csikos and I am an internist with over 40 years of clinical practice experience. For more than a decade, I served as the Chief of Internal Medicine and Director of the Critical Care Unit at the Chan Soon-Shiong Medical Center in Windber, Pennsylvania where I am now the Chief Medical Officer.

Receiving affordable, high-quality care should be a right all Pennsylvanians have and providing affordable access to the highest quality of care possible should be something we all strive for.

Geography, weather, availability of specialists, and transportation all play a role in preventing people from accessing high quality healthcare. However, we do have an effective tool that in many cases can help...that's telemedicine. Telemedicine can break down those barriers, especially for the thousands of Pennsylvanians living in rural and underserved areas. I recently conducted a pilot project that was funded by a grant received from the Pennsylvania Medical Society on advanced virtual care technology. The Chan Soon-Shiong Medical Center in Windber, a rural community, where I work, has a multi-faceted approach to virtual care. The original focus of the project was to virtually connect patients with their primary care physician to decrease emergency department utilization and hospitalization in our area. As a result of telemedicine, we have seen a positive change in our Community Based Palliative Care program. Twenty palliative care patients are currently using virtual care technology to complete their monthly appointments with technology that brings providers directly into their homes on 22-inch screens. While telemedicine is currently being used in the Commonwealth, we have a clear need for a statutory framework under which telemedicine can continue to evolve.

It's hard to believe but a large roadblock in access to patient care is noncompete clauses in physician's contracts. These clauses within an employment contract are designed to restrict a physician's ability to leave an employer and work for a competitor or other medical facility. This means if a physician were to leave their employer, they could be forced to work upwards of 25-50 miles away from any location owned and operated by their previous employer in order to fulfill the "noncompete" clause.

As part of these noncompete agreements, patients are not told where their provider is going to, and the provider is often prohibited from reaching out to their current patients to inform them of their move. Patients will be kept in the dark as to where their physician, who has cared for them and knows their condition best, is practicing. The patient's continuity of care will be broken. Any physician will tell you there is nothing more important than the physician and patient relationship, especially patients with chronic or life-threatening conditions. A foundation of trust is built between a patient and physician, often through major life moments.

PAMED has supported previous legislation on restrictive covenants that aims to prohibit their use in health care practitioner employment contracts, with limited exceptions. Previous legislative proposals allowed for the freedom of movement among employed health care practitioners while protecting health care employers in less densely populated areas who have more difficulty attracting and retaining practitioners. We encourage members of the legislature to work towards passing a measure to do just that.

In last year's state budget, the Primary Care Loan Repayment Program was included to expand access to care in Pennsylvania.

This program provides loan forgiveness for physicians and other health care workers who agree to practice for two years in rural or underserved communities in Pennsylvania and I encourage the legislature to include it for this year's state budget.

Not only will this program retain and recruit young physicians to work in Pennsylvania, but it will also attract them to work in the communities throughout the Commonwealth who have struggled with access to care.

The Pennsylvania Medical Society also looks forward to working with members of these committees to help overburdened Emergency Departments (ED) across our Commonwealth. While "boarding" in the ED is a decades long, unresolved problem, the COVID-19 pandemic brought it to becoming its own public health emergency. Our patients are finding themselves often receiving care in conditions they find less than sub-par, often because of issues that are well out of our control as physicians. This problem of boarding has many causes, some of which would be alleviated by working on, and passing, some of the proposals mentioned in my earlier testimony.

We all play an important role in effectively delivering health care. Whether it's certified nurse practitioners, pharmacists, psychologists, or even surgical technicians, there is a role to be played but the quality of health care is the most important part of our healthcare system. Access to high quality care is a right all Pennsylvanians should have and there are tactics, strategies and technologies that can help us provide that care as I've done in my rural community. While access to care is not a "one solution" problem, and some solutions may be out of your hands as legislators, these two committees can work towards helping us find a solution. By providing further funding for telemedicine and addressing systemic problems to where physicians can practice, it would provide substantial improvements in access to care for many Pennsylvanians.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

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