March 25, 2020

Chair Phil Mendelson

Council of the District of Columbia

1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chair Mendelson and members of the Council:

During these unprecedented times, I want to thank you for taking swift and decisive action to provide economic support to the employees of the District.

The Medical Society of DC is working with DC Health and the entire Bowser Administration to provide medical treatment to our residents during this public health emergency. As we enter a new phase in fighting the novel coronavirus and protecting District residents, MSDC has identified some key factors that need to be addressed to ensure the vitality of the medical profession. I would ask you to remember these in the coming weeks and months as you consider actions to help the District:

1. Independent physician practices are small businesses, and the economic ripples of COVID-19 impact physician offices in a unique way. ***We depend on physicians to serve as a screening tool for transmittable diseases, yet during COVID-19 we are seeing small physician practices struggling to operate and remain open.*** The combination of being unable to adequately protect their offices plus patients cancelling appointments in fear means the city could see fewer primary care or specialty offices in the years to come.
2. Telemedicine has been an important tool in social distancing and allows patients to receive some medical help from physicians. Yet the disparate rules from insurers on telemedicine allowances and reimbursements means neither the patient nor physician is incentivized to use telemedicine over an in-person visit for basic care.

I have attached with this letter our document sent to DC Health with some proposed guidance and MSDC assistance during this crisis. Since we sent this to DC Health, they have already addressed a few of these issues. However, I want to highlight a few important solutions that the Council can consider in the coming months.

* Public and private insurers should incentivize patients and providers to use telemedicine, even after the COVID-19 public health emergency passes, to create a more equitable and accessible healthcare system.
* Small medical offices should be considered small businesses in any business relief considered by the Council and the entire District government should consider proactive strategies to ensure physician practices can financially survive this epidemic.
* The Council and Bowser Administration should consider smart and safe policies protecting physicians from malpractice liability concerns that should not apply in a public emergency, especially with an expansion of telemedicine.

MSDC looks forward to continuing serving as a resource during this public health emergency and look forward to the time when DC’s response will be an example of how public-private partnerships can work together in the most unsettled times.

Sincerely,

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J. Desiree Pineda, MD, FACP

President, MSDC

CC: Members of the Council