

June 10, 2020

Testimony of J. Desiree Pineda, MD, FACP
President, Medical Society of the District of Columbia

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today as part of its FY2021 budget process. My name is Dr. Desiree Pineda, and I am the 2019-2020 President of the Medical Society of DC. To state the obvious, this hearing comes at a time of much uncertainty in the District, however as my testimony will show, many of the issues we are considering today are at their core issues we've been discussing for years.

One thing I want to note – while my testimony is during the DC Health time, my points also apply to the other agencies being considered today.

I want to begin by noting that COVID-19 taught us an important lesson – a holistic approach to health care is essential. We cannot depend on one industry or one part of the health care sector to solve society's health needs. MSDC is committed to continue working with the other health care organizations testifying together to improve the health of this city.

There are two areas of the Mayor's budget we want to highlight today as areas we support:

- We support the budget's inclusion of funds for primary care offices and specialty provider offices as part of the Mayor's Commission recommendations.
- We support the inclusion of funds for the new hospital on the campus of St. Elizabeth's

I want to dedicate my remaining time to discussing an issue that I know is important to this committee and the Council. COVID-19 and the current political protests have highlighted the health and social inequalities minority communities face in the District. We can no longer give lip service to pushing for equitable health care for underserved areas, especially in Wards 7 and 8. The time for action is now.

MSDC is taking action. With the goal to provide the highest level of care to residents, we are partnering with different groups to support a physician network in Wards 7 and 8. We are helping existing practices survive by offering practice resources, and laying the groundwork for a new pipeline of physicians to serve in this area in the future.

What can the Council do to support these initiatives?

- Ensure the budget increases Medicaid provider payments on par with private payer payments or at least on par with Medicare payments
- Ensure hospital contracts with the District carve out spaces for affiliated independent physician practices
- Ensure that current practicing physicians in Wards 7 and 8, especially those practicing at UMC, have priority to buy or rent in the new hospital office building.

- Continue to fund HPLRP and other funding mechanisms to help new physician practices in underserved area
- Reform medical liability laws to offer some protection to physicians acting in good faith
- Create funding mechanisms and incentives to encourage physicians to rent or buy property in underserved areas, the same way Prince George's County is doing to recruit DC physicians across the border. Physicians already practicing in Wards 7 and 8 and UMC should have priority to these funds and incentives.

As we have been doing since the District Council was created, MSDC and the physician community looks forward to working with you to make the District the best place to practice medicine.