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April 15, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leaders Schumer and McCarthy:

On behalf of the professional medical organizations whose members are on the front lines of responding to the COVID-19 crisis in hospitals and critical care units across the U.S., we want to thank the Congress and the Administration for the initial steps taken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As frontline providers, we see the challenges and incredible dedication of health care workers responding to COVID-19. We also are acutely aware of the pain and suffering the COVID virus outbreak is inflicting on patients and their loved ones across the U.S. While many cities, like New York City, are in the midst of the COVID crisis, it is likely that many more U.S. communities will soon experience the deluge of COVID cases seeking care from hospitals and emergency rooms.

Even as we reiterate the urgent need to procure and appropriately distribute personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits and ventilators to frontline COVID-19 providers, we urge Congress and the Administration to begin responding to some of the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the Administration and Congress to consider the following issues and policy recommendations:

Provider Relief

Relief Fund for COVID Responders – as has been well documented in medical journals and the lay press, due to supply shortages, many health care providers are forced to provide direct patient care to patients with confirmed or suspected COVID virus without appropriate PPE. Because of these occupational exposures to COVID, many are now ill with COVID and some have died from the COVID virus. Most

communities in the U.S. have not yet seen the worst of the COVID pandemic. We expect the risk that clinicians are forced to endure and the tragic toll it may take to continue for the foreseeable future. In recognition of the healing service these frontline clinicians are providing, we urge Congress and the Administration to establish a relief fund for health care providers and their families. This fund should be created to provide financial relief for the income lost from death or disability caused by COVID disease and for additional hazard pay for frontline health care providers.

Tax Deduction for COVID Responders – The COVID pandemic has placed many unexpected economic burdens on frontline providers. Many have used personal funds to purchase PPE for themselves and their colleagues. With many schools and day care centers closing, many health care providers have had to make alternative childcare arrangements to allow them to continue to work. In an effort to protect their families, some health care providers are staying in hotels to reduce the risk of exposing their loved ones to the COVID virus. We urge the Administration and Congress to ensure these COVID-related expenses are fully tax-deductible for health care providers.

Student Loan Debt Relief for COVID Responders – The COVID pandemic has demonstrated the incredible need and value physicians, nurses and respiratory therapists provide our society. Yet many of these providers are struggling from the significant debt incurred for their professional training. We urge Congress and the Administration to consider providing student loan debt relief for COVID-19 frontline providers.

Expanded Adoption of Advance Directives – Due to the anticipated acute shortage of ventilators needed to respond to the expected wave of COVID hospitalizations, hospitals and health care providers are preparing to make hard decisions about allocating scarce medical resources in the face of the overwhelming need. While expanded use of Advance Directives will not solve the medical equipment shortage, it will give both patients and providers useful information to help make difficult decisions under these challenging circumstances.

Expanded Liability Protection for COVID Frontline Providers – The looming heart-wrenching decisions that the COVID pandemic may force patients and providers to make will inevitably lead to some patients or their families suing frontline providers for the likely outcomes of these hard decisions. Additionally, health care professionals will be using a range of untested and unproven treatments to address this previously unknown disease. We urge Congress to provide expanded liability protection to frontline responders who are doing heroic work in the midst of this unprecedented crisis.

We appreciate the many initial steps Congress and the Administration have taken so far to respond to the COVID pandemic. We are committed to continuing our direct care to patients and coordinating with local, state and federal officials to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

American Thoracic Society

American College of Emergency Physicians

American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST)

Society of Critical Care Medicine

Society of Hospital Medicine