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Every physician matters, each patient counts.

June 14, 2022

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Dear FY'23 Budget Conferees,

On behalf of the over 25,000 physician, resident, and student members of the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS), we wish to thank you for your efforts, as members of the FY'23 Conference Committee, to produce a final report that supports the health care needs of our residents, including through the full funding of MassHealth, increased resources for those with mental health and substance use disorders, various programs to address the unprecedented workforce challenges in health care as well as affordability of care and attention to the issue of access to reproductive health services.

To that end, the MMS supports the following provisions in H.4701

Outside Sections 27B, 27C, and 27D - HIV PrEP

These sections would expand access to critical pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) HIV medication for adolescents. Young people, especially LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ youth of color, are disproportionately impacted by HIV, and the pandemic has exacerbated barriers to HIV testing, prevention, and care. Minors are currently permitted to consent to a myriad of sensitive health services, including the treatment of sexually transmitted infections, HIV among them. This policy will enable young people to obtain PrEP medication, a critical preventive tool that will decrease the rate of new HIV infections among young people, lessen disparities in infection rates, reduce life-long disease burden, and ultimately save lives.

The MMS supports the allowance of minors to consent to PrEP therapy in instances where physicians determine there is clinical appropriateness, and the patient otherwise has an ability to consent.

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Outside Section 52 – Health Insurance Premium Assistance

This provision would establish a two-year pilot program to extend eligibility for premium assistance payments or point of-service cost-sharing subsidies for applicants at or below 500 per cent of the federal poverty guidelines.

This program would provide insurance premium subsidies for a broader subset of individuals and families across Massachusetts. These subsidies help improve the affordability of health insurance and allow selection of higher quality insurance products that otherwise may be unaffordable. This will have an important impact on reducing out-of-pocket costs and premium costs for a large segment of residents who otherwise often get steered into expensive, high-deductible health plans.

The MMS also supports the following Outside Sections in S.2915, the final Senate budget, related to Provider Access, formerly Amendment #388, to protect gender affirming care and reproductive health care services: 15, 39, 45-50, 71, 78, 94-98, 107-111.

Amendment 388 would establish a statewide standing order that authorizes the dispensing of emergency contraception in Massachusetts by any licensed pharmacist. It would also block extraterritorial laws from interfering with legally protected health care activity in Massachusetts, and seeks to protect those who provide and assist in providing reproductive and gender-affirming health care services, along with the patients who are seeking such care in the Commonwealth.

In these difficult times, with events taking place across the country that have put access to reproductive and gender-affirming health care at risk, the MMS believes that it is imperative that the Commonwealth do all it can to protect our citizens who engage in activities that are lawful under our state laws and statutes. Amendment #388 will accomplish that goal and we urge your support.

And lastly, the MMS supports Outside Section 70A in S.2915 to establish an Oral Health Special Commission and statewide needs assessment.

Massachusetts residents continue to face a concerning lack of access to affordable dental care, and outdated research on oral health needs in our state hinder our ability to understand the challenges we face and how to address them. The Oral Health Special Commission, as established under this section, would conduct a statewide oral health needs assessment to evaluate gaps in access to oral health care and services across diverse populations and ages. The diverse commission would also be charged with making and prioritizing actionable recommendations to strengthen and expand the

Commonwealth's oral health infrastructure and workforce, as well as identify effective, evidence-based strategies to reduce oral health disparities and advance health equity.

Thank you for your attention to the priorities of the Medical Society

Sincerely,

Theodore A. Calianos, II, MD, FACS