

October 10, 2025

The Honorable Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Joyce, M.D.
U.S. House of Representatives
152 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
U.S. Senate
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Deborah Ross
U.S. House of Representatives
1221 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act. (S. 1380/ H.R. 4861)

Dear Senators Rosen and Wicker and Representatives Joyce and Ross:

On behalf of the undersigned advocacy organizations dedicated to serving patients with a wide range of diseases and conditions, we offer our support for the Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act. (S. 1380/ H.R. 4861). This bipartisan legislation establishes a new loan repayment program to incentivize specialists to practice in rural areas and expands access for millions of Americans who lack access to close and readily available specialty physicians.

Individuals living in rural areas in the US, which number over 46 million, have long faced disparities in healthcare outcomes. Barriers to receiving care depend on several factors, including geography, economic constraints, and a shortage of physicians. Rural patients often travel hours to see a physician – if they are able to find one – which can result in missed work, childcare challenges, and higher out-of-pocket costs for gas or meals. Without reliable and timely access to care, rural patients often face delayed diagnoses and intervention, which can worsen health disparities and increase costs to the healthcare system. We need policy solutions to help close these gaps in health equity for rural populations.

Even when patients living in urban and rural communities are finally able to find the type of specialist they need, they face additional hurdles to care. A recent study revealed that the average wait time for a physician appointment across five specialties (cardiology, dermatology, family medicine, obstetrics-gynecology, and orthopedic surgery) in metropolitan areas is 26 days. The study found that in “smaller communities, wait times can be 50 percent or more longer.”¹ If patients in urban areas – where specialists are concentrated - are already experiencing longer wait times for care, it is all the more troubling for rural patients who face even greater geographic and access barriers.

Geographic barriers and timely access to care are compounded by the nationwide shortage of physicians. The US faces a projected shortage of 86,000 physicians by 2036, with an expected

1. Cheney C. Physician appointment wait times have increased significantly, survey finds. HealthLeaders; September 12, 2022. <https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/clinical-care/physician-appointment-wait-times-have-increased-significantly-survey-finds>

shortfall of 44,900 specialists.² Rural communities are disproportionately affected by this shortage, with the problem only worsening. According to the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, no specialty currently has enough practitioners to meet patients' needs in non-metropolitan areas.³ By 2037, non-metropolitan areas will experience a 60 percent shortage of physicians.⁴ Predicted shortages for specialists in non-metropolitan areas range from 94 percent for neonatologists to 48 percent for emergency medicine physicians.⁵

The lack of recruiting and retention of specialty physicians to practice in rural America consistently contributes to delays in care for those needing access to a specialist. While our nation faces a shortage of specialty physicians, the SPARC Act ensures that the specialists we do have are directed to the communities that need them the most. It creates meaningful incentives for specialists to serve in rural communities, helping to alleviate the burdens patients face from delayed diagnosis and treatment, long travel times, and limited access to timely care.

The urgency of strengthening the pipeline of specialty care providers in rural and medically underserved areas cannot be overstated. If left unaddressed, this shortage will widen gaps between urban and rural communities. Rural Americans, who already face higher rates of chronic illness and limited access to care, deserve equal opportunities to thrive. The SPARC Act would help to address this looming public health crisis, and we applaud your leadership in introducing this important legislation.

We look forward to working with you and the Congressional leadership to advance and pass the Specialty Physicians Advancing Rural Care (SPARC) Act.

Sincerely,

Active Surveillance Patients International
American Urogynecologic Society (AUGS)
Caregiver Action Network
Chris "CJ" Johnson Foundation Inc.
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered
Interstitial Cystitis Association
Judy Nicholson Kidney Cancer Foundation (JNF)
KCCure
Men's Health Network
National Association For Continence
National Kidney Foundation

² American Academy of Medical Colleges, *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand Projections From 2021 to 2036*. Retrieved September 8, 2025, from <https://www.aamc.org/media/75236/download?attachment>.

³ National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. *Health Workforce Projections Dashboard*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources & Services Administration. Retrieved June 3, 2025 from <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/workforce-projections>.

⁴ National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. *Health Workforce Projections*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources & Services Administration. Retrieved June 3, 2025, from <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/data-research/projecting-health-workforce-supply-demand>.

⁵ National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. *Health Workforce Projections Dashboard*. Retrieved June 3, 2025 from <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/workforce-projections>.

Patient Empowerment Network
Spina Bifida Association
Spina Bifida Association of New York State
VHL Alliance
Your Prostate Cancer.help, Inc
ZERO Prostate Cancer