



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

TREATING OUR FAMILY AND YOURS



TO: Members of the West Virginia State Senate Health and Human Resources Committee

FROM: American Osteopathic Association
West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians – West Virginia Chapter

DATE: February 12, 2024

SUBJECT: In OPPOSITION to Senate Bill 714

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA), the West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association (WVOMA), the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOF) and ACOFP – West Virginia write to express our strong opposition to SB 714. This bill eliminates the West Virginia Board of Osteopathic Medicine (WVBOM) and transfers regulation of osteopathic physicians (DOs) to the West Virginia Board of Medicine, which regulates allopathic physicians (MDs).

The AOA represents more than 186,000 DOs and medical students (OMSs) nationwide. The AOA promotes public health, encourages scientific research, serves as the primary certifying body for DOs and is the accrediting agency for osteopathic medical schools, including the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM) in Lewisburg, West Virginia. The WVOMA is a professional medical organization representing the 1,703 licensed DOs and over 800 OMSs currently attending WVSOM, the state's largest medical school. The national ACOFP and ACOFP – West Virginia are medical specialty societies representing 30,296 osteopathic family physicians, including 886 in West Virginia.

All DOs and MDs complete:

- Four years of medical school;
- Three-to-seven plus years of supervised postgraduate (“residency”) training in their chosen specialty;
- A comprehensive licensing exam series;
- Many then also choose to sit for optional certifying board exams which serve as a mark of excellence in their medical specialty.

DOs **additionally** receive **several hundred hours of training** that MDs traditionally do not receive, **in osteopathic principles and practice**, which allows them to provide hands-on treatment to their patients (osteopathic manipulative treatment or OMT) and approach their care from a holistic perspective that takes into account mind, body and spirit.

Further, the unique osteopathic philosophy is woven throughout osteopathic medical education and training, and osteopathic competencies are assessed via the DO licensing exam series, the Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States (COMLEX-USA).

Many students choose to pursue a career in osteopathic medicine specifically for the additional training and unique approach to care that allows them to partner with their patients to achieve sustainable, long-term wellness, encompassing both their physical and mental health. OMT has been shown to help patients with a variety of complex conditions, including chronic low back pain, alleviating the need for

riskier pharmacologic interventions such as opioids.¹ For these reasons, **DOs tend to pursue careers in primary care specialties and in rural and underserved urban areas at higher rates than MDs,**² which holds particular benefits for a state like West Virginia, where 51 of the state's 55 counties are designated as Healthcare Professional Shortage Areas and/or Medically Underserved Areas.³

Further, the WVBOM has been efficiently serving DOs and their patients since 1923, as evidenced by the fact that the Board is **entirely self-sustaining** through application fees and fines, and does not require any money from the state to operate.

In addition, while the MD board processes applications and complaints on a quarterly basis, the WVBOM board does so on a **rolling basis**, which facilitates timely entry into – and continued – practice for qualified DOs in the state.

Our organizations urge you to celebrate and support DOs' unique contributions to the health and well-being of West Virginia's patients, who benefit from the holistic and hands-on approach to care that DOs specialize in. The WVBOM is uniquely positioned to assess osteopathic competencies, and take disciplinary action where needed, and has been efficiently and effectively serving West Virginia for more than 100 years. For these reasons, we strongly encourage you to **oppose Senate Bill 714**.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact Raine Richards, JD, AOA Vice President of State and International Affairs, at richards@osteopathic.org or Penny Fioravante, WVOMA Executive Director, at penny@wvoma.com.

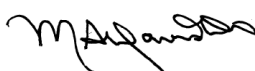
Sincerely,



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¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7381089/>

² <https://osteopathic.org/index.php?aam-media=/wp-content/uploads/2023-OMP-Report.pdf>

³ https://www.timeswv.com/opinion/guest_columns/today-is-national-rural-health-day/article_7472cf5e-83f9-11ee-b6b8-d303154383c8.html