



**Association of  
American Medical Colleges**  
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February 11, 2021

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ami Bera, MD  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Scott Peters  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Baldwin and Representatives Bera and Peters:

On behalf of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), thank you for introducing the Tracking COVID-19 Variants Act, which would authorize \$2 billion to increase genetic sequencing capabilities and more quickly identify novel SARS-CoV-2 variants to better respond to the ongoing pandemic. The AAMC is pleased to endorse this important legislation.

The AAMC is a not-for-profit association dedicated to transforming health through medical education, health care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 155 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; more than 400 teaching hospitals and health systems, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and their more than 179,000 full-time faculty members, 92,000 medical students, 140,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. Our members have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 response, from activating and refining hospital and community surge plans to advancing research to identify promising diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines.

As you know, to contain the pandemic, we must be more agile in responding to the virus as it changes, including a need to better understand existing or emerging variants. Currently, the U.S. is sequencing only a small fraction of the nation's confirmed cases, leaving us vulnerable to wide infection by undetected variants. Medical schools and teaching hospitals, as leading centers of medical research, commonly utilize state-of-the-art genome sequencing technologies and analyses to better understand human disease and improve patient care. Consistent with their mission and in service to their communities and the nation, many already are applying this expertise to the COVID-19 response in collaboration with local health departments and other partners, but there is an urgent need to dramatically scale up this work.

A number of AAMC member institutions are currently participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s SARS-CoV-2 Sequencing for Public Health Emergency Response, Epidemiology and Surveillance (SPHERES) consortium. This public-private partnership, led by CDC's Advanced Molecular Detection (AMD) program, and other CDC initiatives serve an important public health role in collecting viral genomic surveillance data to generate a more informed community response. Your legislation would provide vital support to increase both the consortium's capacity and other efforts led by the CDC to monitor changes in transmission of new viral strains. This important investment would go a long way in enhancing CDC's efforts and allow the agency to extend support to additional institutions with existing assets and expertise that are well structured to sequence and analyze data rapidly and efficiently. With a broad-based approach, we will be better positioned to successfully scale and maintain a national campaign to identify, track, and mitigate the spread of novel SARS-CoV-2 strains.

AAMC member institutions stand ready to harness their existing sequencing technology and analytical expertise to aid in more quickly identifying novel SARS-CoV-2 variants, investigating potential health impacts of new strains, and providing data to assist in tracking community spread of new variants. Thank you again for your legislation, which is critical in facilitating this partnership. The AAMC as an organization also remains available to provide internal expertise to address this important effort. Please do not hesitate to contact AAMC Senior Director Tannaz Rasouli ([trasouli@aamc.org](mailto:trasouli@aamc.org)) with any questions. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,



David J. Skorton, MD  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Association of American Medical Colleges