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April 1, 2025

The Honorable Mike Fong
Chair, Assembly Committee on Higher Education
1020 N Street, Room 173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1361 (Bains), UC Kern medical school feasibility study - SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Fong,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong support for AB 1361 (Bains), which directs the University of California (UC) to conduct a feasibility study on establishing a medical school in Kern County. This legislation represents a crucial step toward addressing the severe shortage of physicians and healthcare professionals in our region.

Kern County and the broader San Joaquin Valley have long faced significant disparities in healthcare access due to a chronic shortage of medical providers. Our region has the lowest ratio of licensed medical professionals in the state, with just 157 physicians per 100,000 residents—far below the 411 per 100,000 seen in the Bay Area. This shortage is especially concerning in primary care, where demand continues to outpace the supply of providers. As many rural physicians near retirement, the gap in care is expected to grow even wider.

AB 1361 lays the groundwork for a long-term solution by requiring a comprehensive study of the challenges and opportunities associated with establishing a UC medical school in Kern County. Research has consistently shown that medical schools and residency programs located in rural areas play a key role in increasing the number of physicians who choose to practice in those communities. By recruiting students from rural backgrounds and offering specialized training in rural medicine, a medical school in Kern County would help build a sustainable pipeline of healthcare providers for the region.

This bill builds upon the momentum of AB 2357 (Bains, 2024), which established an endowment fund to support a UC medical school in Kern County. AB 1361 is the next critical step in making this vision a reality. We urge the Legislature's full support and appreciate your leadership in advancing healthcare access for Kern County and the entire San Joaquin Valley.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Leticia Perez", written over a circular stamp.

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Committee on Higher Education
Honorable Members, Kern Legislative Delegation
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange