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It is imperative that we as a country understand the significance of Black physicians providing care for Black patients. Studies show that when Black patients are treated by Black doctors, they are more satisfied with their healthcare, more likely to have received the preventive care they needed in the past year, and are more likely to agree to recommended preventive care. Though the AAMC reports an increase in Black or African American medical school matriculants in 2022-23, now making up 10%, we have even greater work to do. With key factors such as student loan forgiveness, increased exposure and visibility, and mentorship for students aspiring to be in healthcare we can increase the number of Black Americans in the medical field and subsequently improve health outcomes for Black Americans.

According to an article written in the New England Journal of Medicine, children from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds who aspire to be physicians are more likely than their peers to drop those aspirations before 12th grade in part due to a lack of exposure and structural and racial biases in society. Efforts to inspire students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue a career in medicine should begin at the grade school level. Through pipeline programs, college readiness initiatives, and mentoring opportunities that provide guidance and proctored hands-on activities for students, we can inspire these future leaders to attain their aspirations despite any obstacles encountered along the way. With persistent exposure to careers in healthcare we will see a significant increase in the number of Black Americans in the medical field.

The cost of American medical education has increased substantially over the past decade. Attending medical school without a scholarship can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt. Despite this, students continue to aspire a career in medicine. These aspirations are thwarted when students are not able to afford housing, food, and other necessities while in school. The burden of accumulating debt while attending school works to deter potential students from this rewarding career. Learners need student loan debt forgiveness, increased funding for scholarships, and more financial support for HBCU medical schools to be able to afford to continue their education.

For some, the topic of Black representation in the medical field may seem like a trivial matter, but for others it may mean the difference in the life of a loved one. For a young Black couple who presented to the hospital to an all-white healthcare team with concerns that their 5-year-old son was ill, this topic is of particular importance. This couple trusted their son to be cared for by a capable group of physicians that they believed would render quality medical care for him. How could they have known he would be misdiagnosed with a 24-hour, instead of his actual diagnosis of bacterial meningitis which proved to be fatal the next day. Why weren't their concerns taken seriously? Why did he not receive the appropriate standard of care? Could this outcome have been any different if they were attended to by a Black physician? The couple in this story are my parents and the young child was my brother, Bryce, and the reason I aspire to

become a physician. I want my patients who look like me and those who don't look like me to both receive the same excellent care in an equitable manner.

We can achieve the goal of a substantial increase in the Black American representation in the medical field, but it will take more individuals like you, Senator Sanders, and the HELP committee to achieve this goal.