

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 1, 2020

Dr. David J. Skorton, MD
President and Chief Executive Officer
Association of American Medical Colleges
655 K Street, NW, Suite 100
Washington, DC, 20001-2399

Dear Dr. Skorton:

We write seeking additional information regarding the steps being taken to protect prospective medical students as the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is administered during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Students have reported unsafe testing conditions and a lack of screening protocols to prevent the spread of the disease in enclosed testing sites.¹ It is imperative all possible steps are taken to protect students to provide a safe testing site, particularly as they take such an important exam in their efforts to join the ranks of frontline, health care professionals.

The MCAT is a seven and a half hour standardized exam designed to test students' readiness for medical school and is requisite for entry for almost all U.S. medical schools.² The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has been responsible for the administration of the test since 1947 and partners with the testing company Pearson Vue to administer, collect, and distribute scores to students.³

The MCAT is a critical factor in a prospective student's medical school application and was administered over 270,000 times between 2017-2019.⁴ Despite the ongoing pandemic, the MCAT remains one of the few high stakes tests still being taken in-person and tens of thousands of prospective medical students are still seeking to take the exam.⁵ AAMC and Pearson Vue have taken some steps to promote COVID-19 safety during testing. For example, the test has been

¹ Students for Ethical Admissions, "Open Letter to the AAMC," July 12, 2020, <https://www.ethicalstudents.org/resources-1>.

² American Association of Medical Colleges, "About the MCAT Exam," <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/about-mcat-exam/>.

³ American Association of Medical Colleges, "Who We Are | AAMC History," <https://www.aamc.org/who-we-are/aamc-history>; Pearson VUE, "Pearson VUE to deliver Medical College Admission Test® (MCAT®) beginning in 2018," March 3, 2017, <https://home.pearsonvue.com/About-Pearson-VUE/Press-Room/2017/Pearson-VUE-to-deliver-MCAT%C2%AE-beginning-in-2018.aspx>.

⁴ American Association of Medical Colleges, "Using MCAT Data in 2021 Medical Student Selection," 2020, https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-07/services_mcat_using-mcat-data-in-2021-medical-student-selection-guide_07082020_0.pdf.

⁵ New York Times, "Want to Be a Doctor? Take Your Chances in a Closed Room With Strangers," Roni Caryn Rabin, August 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/health/coronavirus-exams-mcat.html>.

shortened to just under six hours to reduce examinee's time spent in the testing room together.⁶ Staff and examinees are required to wear masks or other face coverings at all times during the exam and hand sanitizer has been made available in the testing room.⁷ The number of examinees in each testing session has been limited to ensure that all staff and students are able to maintain six-foot distance from one another at all times, and AAMC is encouraging students with disabilities or underlying health conditions to apply for testing accommodations.⁸ Meanwhile, AAMC has issued a set of cleaning and sanitation guidelines for testing facilities.⁹

However, reports of unsafe testing conditions and lack of COVID-19 screening protocols at testing sites have begun to surface.¹⁰ In a recent survey conducted by Students for Ethical Admissions, 64 percent of respondents reported their testing sites had no COVID-19 screening protocols in place.¹¹ Students have also reported that some testing sites had "no social distancing measures at all," that mask requirements were not consistently followed or enforced, and that testing sites and computers are not adequately cleaned, despite AAMC and Pearson VUE requirements.¹² Alarming, students have also reported contracting COVID-19 and passing it to relatives after taking the exam in unsafe testing conditions.¹³

These reports paint a concerning picture. Completion of the MCAT represents a major milestone in a prospective medical students' career. They deserve a safe testing environment in which they do not have to worry about contracting COVID-19. While we understand the difficulties of administering such a high-stakes test during a global pandemic, it is imperative all steps be taken to ensure the health and safety of all students taking the MCAT. We want to ensure you have the tools and resource at your disposal to guarantee this is the case. As such, we request answers to the following questions no later than September 15, 2020.

1. Please provide copies of all guidance that AAMC has provided to students, MCAT testing locations, and test proctors to ensure safety during the COVID-19 pandemic? How is AAMC ensuring this guidance is being followed at its testing locations?
2. Other graduate school admissions tests, such as the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE),¹⁴ the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT),¹⁵ and the Graduate Management

⁶ American Association of Medical Colleges, "COVID-19 Changes to the MCAT Exam," May 5, 2020, <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/covid-19-changes-mcat-exam-administrations-may-29-/>.

⁷ American Association of Medical Colleges, "Protecting Your Health and Safety on Test Day," <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/protecting-your-health-and-safety-test-day/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ New York Times, "Want to Be a Doctor? Take Your Chances in a Closed Room With Strangers," Roni Caryn Rabin, August 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/health/coronavirus-exams-mcat.html>; Students for Ethical Admissions, "Open Letter to the AAMC," July 12, 2020, <https://www.ethicalstudents.org/resources-1>.

¹¹ Students for Ethical Admissions, "Open Letter to the AAMC," July 12, 2020, <https://www.ethicalstudents.org/resources-1>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ ETS, "GRE General Test At Home," <https://www.ets.org/s/cv/gre/at-home/>.

¹⁵ Law School Admissions Council, "Introducing LSAT-Flex," <https://www.lsac.org/update-coronavirus-and-lsat/lsat-flex>.

Admission Test (GMAT),¹⁶ are being offered at-home to help protect prospective students from COVID-19. Has the AAMC considered offering an at-home MCAT? If so, what are its plans to roll out the at-home test? If not, why not?

3. Does AAMC have a system in place to collect, track, and respond to test-takers' concerns about public health safety at MCAT testing sites? If so, please describe this system and the process of intaking and responding to complaints.
4. AAMC offers students with disabilities and other medical conditions to request MCAT accommodations. How many students has AAMC provided with testing accommodations since March 2020, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.? How does this compare to accommodations offered from March 2019-August 2019?
5. Has AAMC considered similar accommodations for students who share a household with individuals with pre-existing conditions or may be at risk of COVID-19 complications?

We look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation's medical students are given every measure of protection and consideration. We are responsible for safeguarding our students and the future of our health care workforce. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

¹⁶ GMAT Online, "Learn More About the GMAT™ Online Exam," <https://www.mba.com/exams/gmat-online>.