Nos. 20-1199 & 21-707

In The

Supreme Court of the United States

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Students for Fair Admissions, Inc.,

*Petitioner*,

v.

President and Fellows of Harvard College,

*Respondent*.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Students for Fair Admissions, Inc.,

*Petitioner*,

v.

University of North Carolina, et al.,

*Respondents*.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

On Writs of Certiorari  
to the United States Courts of Appeals  
for the First and Fourth Circuits

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**BRIEF FOR AMICI CURIAE  
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN  
MEDICAL COLLEGES ET AL.   
in support of RESPONDENTS**

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in support of RESPONDENTS**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# INTERESTS OF AMICI CURIAE[[1]](#footnote-2)

The Association of American Medical Colleges (“AAMC”) is a non-profit educational association whose members include all 155 accredited U.S. medical schools; more than 400 teaching hospitals and health systems; 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 191,000 full-time faculty members, 95,000 medical students, 149,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences.

AAMC is joined in this brief by:

1. Seventeen organizations whose members include schools, residency programs, and other institutions involved in educating and training healthcare providers and administrators:

American Association of Colleges of Nursing;

[American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine];

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy;

American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine;

American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges;

American Dental Education Association;

American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering;

[Associated Medical Schools of New York];

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry;

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health;

Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions;

Association of University Programs in Health Administration;

Breast Cancer Research Foundation

Council on Social Work Education;

[National Association of Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, Inc.];

Physician Assistant Education Association; and

[The ASPIRA Association]

2. Twenty-one organizations whose members include physicians and other healthcare providers:

Alliance of Multicultural Physicians

American Medical Association;

[American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons];

American Academy of Physician Assistants;

American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training;

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists;

[American Dental Association];

American Academy of Family Physicians;

American Academy of Pediatrics;

American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine;

American Nurses Association;

[American Psychiatric Association];

American Public Health Association;

American Society of Hematology;

Association of American Indian Physicians;

Council of Medical Specialty Societies;

[National Association of Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, Inc.];

National Hispanic Medical Association;

[National Medical Association];

Pediatric Policy Council; and [Society of General Internal Medicine]; and

3. Three organizations representing the interests of medical school students:

American Medical Student Association;

National Medical Fellowships, Inc.; and

Student National Medical Association..

# SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Diversity in the education of the Nation’s physicians and other healthcare professionals is an absolute medical imperative. As an overwhelming body of scientific research compiled over decades confirms, diversity in medical education quite literally saves lives by ensuring that the Nation’s increasingly diverse population will be served by healthcare professionals competent to meet its needs. Although the United States suffers from severe racial and ethnic disparities in access to quality medical care, research confirms both that physicians from minority[[2]](#footnote-3) backgrounds are more likely to serve underserved communities and that being treated by such physicians greatly increases the likelihood of positive medical outcomes for minority patients. For example, in controlled studies, black physicians are far more likely than others to accurately assess black patients’ pain tolerance and prescribe the correct amount of pain medication as a result.[[3]](#footnote-4) And in high-risk pregnancies involving black babies, having a black physician is tantamount to a miracle drug: it ***more than doubles*** the likelihood that the baby will live.[[4]](#footnote-5) Yet due to the enduring and significant underrepre­sentation of minorities in the health professions, many minority patients will never receive care from a person who looks like them or who is trained alongside someone who does.

These facts present a clear imperative for medical education. It is, of course, neither proper nor possible for all minority patients to be treated by minority healthcare professionals. But medical educators have learned—through both scientific research and years of experience—that health disparities such as those described can be minimized when health professionals have learned and worked next to professionals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in environments that reflect the ever-increasing diversity of the society the profession serves. Thus, diversity in medical education yields better health outcomes not just because minority professionals are often more willing to serve (and more effective at serving) minority communities, but because ***all*** physicians become better practitioners overall as a result of a diverse working and learning environment.

As the gatekeepers to the medical profession, health-professional schools owe obligations to society at large—not just to their students and applicants. Among those obligations is a responsibility to improve medical care and access thereto. The need for such improvements is felt most acutely by minority communities, which generally receive less and lower-quality care than the national average. And given the demonstrated, measurable health benefits of main­taining a diverse medical profession, the Nation’s medical schools would be shirking those basic obligations if they failed to admit and graduate diverse physicians and other healthcare professionals.

In *Regents of the University of California* v. *Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)—a decision that specifically addressed medical education—the Court approved of this principle, with Justice Powell providing the deciding rationale. As he explained, “[p]hysicians serve a heterogeneous population,” and “[a]n otherwise qualified medical student with a particular background—whether it be ethnic, geographic, culturally advantaged,” or otherwise, “may bring to a professional school of medicine experiences, outlooks, and ideas that enrich the training of its student body and better equip its graduates to render with understanding their vital service to humanity.” *Id.* at 314. Twenty-five years later, the Court endorsed Justice Powell’s rationale, after observing that “[p]ublic and private universities across the Nation have modeled their own admissions programs on Justice Powell’s views.” *Grutter* v. *Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 323 (2003); *see also id.* at 387 (Kennedy, J., dissenting). And in the *Fisher* cases, the Court reaffirmed *Bakke* yet again. *See Fisher* v. *Univ. of Tex.*, 570 U.S. 297, 303 (2013) (“*Fisher I*”); *Fisher* v. *Univ. of Tex.*, 579 U.S. 365, 387 (2016) (“*Fisher II*”).

Justice Powell’s words continue to ring true today. In fact, given the Nation’s increased—and increasing—diversity, the need to train the next generation of physicians in a diverse educational environment is even more important now, as is the need to graduate medical professionals reflecting the diversity of those they serve. Studies conclusively establish that when physicians understand more about the diverse cultures and individuality of their patients, medical outcomes improve. Thus, preventing medical educators from continuing to consider diversity in admissions would not merely impoverish the educational experience of all future healthcare professionals; it would literally cost lives and diminish the quality of many others’.

In the decades since *Bakke*, and through *Fisher II*, the Nation’s medical schools have been implementing and refining holistic admissions methods of the type this Court has repeatedly approved. In evaluating an applicant’s ability to contribute to and benefit from an enriching educational environment, race is considered merely as one of many factors, none of which is dispositive standing alone. Although test scores and grades are a significant barometer of merit, they have never been independently determinative in medical school admissions, which have also always given substantial weight to the individualized interviews that are required of each admitted student. The goal is not mechanically to admit students based on numerical criteria or to mirror the country’s demographics, but rather to produce a class of physicians best equipped to serve ***all***of society.

There is no proven substitute for this individualized, holistic review, and prohibiting it would open a Pandora’s box by preventing some applicants from being considered for their full selves and history and thereby limiting medical schools in fulfilling their obligations to society. There is no way to know how non-diverse the healthcare community would become in future years and decades if holistic review were forbidden in medical education, but it is clear that the lives and health of the American public would be gravely diminished. Accordingly, amici urge this Court to take no action that would disrupt the admissions processes the Nation’s health-professional schools have carefully crafted in reliance on this Court’s longstanding precedents.

# ARGUMENT

## DIVERSITY IS VITAL TO HEALTHCARE OUTCOMES AND, THEREFORE, TO THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF the NATION’S MEDICAL SCHOOLS.

### Race-Linked Health Inequities Require Urgent Intervention.

Despite attracting the best medical trainees from around the world, the United States continues to rank shockingly high on certain negative health outcomes compared to other nations. This is likely due, in part, to a large segment of American society continuing to suffer disproportionately from preventable disease and early death notwithstanding the possibility of advanced care. These significant health disparities persist along lines of socio-economic status, urban or rural residence, and, most notably, race and ethnicity.[[5]](#footnote-6) Minority popu­lations continue to suffer disproportionately from numerous health conditions. As just one example, if a white mother and a black mother give birth on the same day in the same American hospital, the black mother is roughly ***four times*** more likely to die from childbirth-related complications—a disparity that persists even controlling for socioeconomic status, lifestyle, insurance coverage, and other factors.[[6]](#footnote-7) Thousands of other studies have confirmed race-linked health inequities in nearly every index of human health.[[7]](#footnote-8) And the COVID-19 pandemic brought that impact into sharp focus, with black and Hispanic Americans roughly twice as likely to be hospitalized or die from that disease as their white counterparts—and with even graver outcomes for American Indian and Alaskan Natives.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Although more of the population is insured now than previously, “significant disparities by race, ethnicity, household income, and location of residence persist for access to health insurance[,] access to dental insurance[,] \* \* \* having an ongoing source of care, receiving timely care, and receiving care when needed.”[[9]](#footnote-10) When new technolo­gies emerge to fight disease, minorities experience substantially slower and fewer benefits.[[10]](#footnote-11) While some disparities are due to decreased access to healthcare in minority communities, the disparities persist even where access is universal, such as in veterans’ care.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Moreover, minority com­munities remain medically underserved. Communities with high proportions of African-American and Hispanic residents are far more likely to have physician shortages, regardless of income levels.[[12]](#footnote-13) And that problem is exacerbated by the fact that minorities, due in part to a long history of discriminatory medical practices,[[13]](#footnote-14) express far lower levels of trust in the Nation’s medical system. In a recent poll, 59% of black Americans said they believe blacks are “treated less fairly than whites” when seeking medical treatment.[[14]](#footnote-15) It is thus little surprise that while there is no race-linked difference in awareness of healthy lifestyle choices,[[15]](#footnote-16) black Americans use primary care offices at two-thirds the rate of whites, instead relying more heavily on emergency care.[[16]](#footnote-17)

### Diversity In Medical Education Markedly Improves Health Outcomes.

The data set forth above is severely troubling. Fortunately, however, studies also confirm that diversity in medical education can help alleviate many of the disparities mentioned. To begin with, African-American and Hispanic/Latino medical school graduates are far more likely than their white and Asian counterparts to consider serving underserved communities. By graduation, 56% of African-American and 42% of Hispanic/Latino students are willing to serve the underserved as compared with only 21% of Asian and 23% of white students.[[17]](#footnote-18) A 2015 Senate Report likewise found that “[d]iversity among medical school students is associated with \* \* \* greater willingness to serve diverse populations,” and that “minority health professionals are more likely to serve in areas with high rates of uninsured and areas of under­represented racial and ethnic groups.”[[18]](#footnote-19) And a 2021 study confirmed that minority health professionals have demonstrably higher rates of following through on stated commit­ments to practice in underserved communities.[[19]](#footnote-20) Underserved com­munities are thus part­icularly dependent on minority physicians.[[20]](#footnote-21) Moreover, patients express more trust in professionals with shared or familiar charac­teristics, and exper­ience measurably positive health effects as a result.[[21]](#footnote-22) For example, a controlled study showed that black men were 18% more likely to seek preventive care measures after consultation with a black physician as compared to a non-black doctor.[[22]](#footnote-23) And diverse physicians and researchers are also more likely to focus on identifying medical interventions needed for racial and ethnic minorities.[[23]](#footnote-24)

To be clear: while increasing the numbers of diverse medical professionals will itself improve health outcomes, it is neither a socially desirable nor realistic goal for all minority patients to see physicians of their own race or ethnicity. That scenario is mathematic­ally impossible at current rates of minority medical school enrollment. And in any event, the goal of the health professions is ***not*** racially-segregated care, but rather a workforce in which professionals of ***all*** races are able to establish trustful therapeutic relationships with diverse patients. As shown below, in pursuit of that outcome, racial and ethnic diversity is vital to educating the entire medical profession.

It is appalling that a black baby in a high-risk pregnancy is twice as likely to die if treated by a white doctor than a black one. *See supra* at \_\_ & n. \_\_. That statistic reveals, at best, that some minority physicians are utilizing more effective care practices that medical schools have a moral and professional obligation to learn from and replicate, and at worst, that there are societal and educational deficiencies that medical schools have a moral and professional obligation to attempt to remedy. And the most promising remedy is peer learning within racially diverse medical education environments.

To that end, in addition to training more diverse phy­sicians, medical schools also seek to train a diversity-***educated*** workforce—*i.e.*, one filled with physicians who possess what the profession has called cultural competence. These are physicians who are familiar with the connection between socio-cultural factors and health beliefs and behaviors and who have both the tools and skills to manage these factors appropriately to help eliminate socio-cultural barriers to care[[24]](#footnote-25) and the humility and understanding to avoid stereotypes about patients from those cultures.[[25]](#footnote-26) Training along­side people with diverse backgrounds can challenge faulty heuristics, improving the crucial care compon­ent of effective patient-physician communication.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Based on scientific evidence, medical schools are committed to fostering a diverse educational environ­ment because a diverse student body produces measurable public health benefits. For example, as noted, studies showed that white physicians were more likely to assume black patients had a higher tolerance for pain, and resultingly prescribed them less pain medica­tion. *Supra* at \_\_. In response to the risks associated with these and other misconceptions, cultural competence has been made a core requirement for entering medical students.[[27]](#footnote-28) And to maintain accreditation medical school curriculums must include cultural competency training, including “the knowledge, skills, and core professional attributes needed to provide effective care in a multidimensional and diverse society.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

But this competency cannot simply be imposed from the top down. Such instruction, by itself, can have the unintended outcome of a false sense of expertise, inoculation from error, or deepened attachment to prior beliefs, resulting in a paradoxical increase in errors.[[29]](#footnote-30) But where the training is paired with experiences gained from a diverse group of peers, the errors decrease.[[30]](#footnote-31) Medical schools therefore pair classroom instruction with peer-to-peer learning[[31]](#footnote-32) for its demon­strated ability to improve receptivity to others’ insights. [[32]](#footnote-33) And education with diverse peers has been shown to facilitate more meaningful cross-cultural learning.[[33]](#footnote-34) The same is true in practice: members of a diverse work team are less likely to make the types of mistakes they might make in a more culturally homogenous environment.[[34]](#footnote-35) Simply working in a diverse team also increases the expectation and acceptance of respectful inquiry and challenged assumptions.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Medical students who are educated in a diverse student body are thus better able to work with patients of diverse backgrounds.[[36]](#footnote-37) In the healthcare arena, “[r]esearch shows that diverse teams working together and capitalizing on innovative ideas and distinct perspectives outperform homogenous teams. Scientists and trainees from diverse backgrounds and life experiences bring different perspectives, creativity, and individual enterprise to address complex scientific problems.”[[37]](#footnote-38)

### Medical Professionals, Not Judges, Should Determine How Best To Prepare Students To Meet Patients’ Diverse Needs.

Diversity in medical school admissions is thus not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieving core educational and medical goals defined by each institution.[[38]](#footnote-39) While diversity may include race, ethnicity, and gender, it is a “student-specific, multidimensional concept” that “may encompass other dimensions of experiences and attributes” including, among other things, an applicant’s having overcome hardships or cultural barriers, languages spoken, socioeconomic status, and geography. *Id.*

This flexibility means that diversity in medical education is not a “one-size-fits-all” concept. Just as it can encompass a variety of factors within a single school, it may have different meanings from one school to the next. Depending on the “institutional mission, educational goals, the kind of students a medical school wants to educate, and the kind of physicians it wants to graduate,” the diversity interests of one medical school may be markedly different from those of another. *Id.* While their practices will likely share common elements, each school determines for itself how best to apply diversity principles in pursuing its institutional goals.

For most medical schools, these goals include producing culturally-competent physicians who are well-adapted to serve patients from across the varied racial and ethnic makeup of the Nation. As this Court recognized in *Grutter*, “student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and ‘better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals.’” 539 U.S. at 330 (citation omitted). For the medical professions, these benefits are particu­larly important because human lives are directly at stake. A diverse student body helps to promote the empathy, emo­tional intelligence, and cultural humility and under­standing required of physicians and other healthcare professionals in a diverse world. These benefits of diversity in health-professional education have been recognized by Congress,[[39]](#footnote-40) stu­dents,[[40]](#footnote-41) and faculty.[[41]](#footnote-42)

To select candidates embodying these diverse viewpoints, medical schools consider factors that can include rural or urban backgrounds, bachelor’s degrees in the sciences or liberal arts, unusual life experiences, and disparate racial and economic backgrounds, among others. A richly diverse class can contribute to a dynamic, multidimensional education­al environment where classroom and study-group discussions add insight to course materials. As Justice Powell put it, “[i]t is not too much to say that the ‘nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure’ to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples.” *Bakke*, 438 U.S. at 313 (Powell, J.) (citation omitted).

For the healthcare professions, racial and ethnic diversity is thus not merely an abstract goal, but a medical imperative. Amici have concluded that a diverse educational environment is essential to addressing the healthcare needs of this Nation’s people. The bodies respon­sible for accrediting medical schools likewise recognize the important role that student diversity plays in the effective delivery of healthcare.[[42]](#footnote-43) There can be no more compelling interest than that. And as the Court has repeatedly reaffirmed, this educational and medical judgment warrants deference.[[43]](#footnote-44)

## MEDICAL SCHOOLS HAVE LONG RELIED ON HOLISTIC REVIEW FOR ADMISSIONS DECISIONS.

A strong grasp of biological sciences and demon­strated academic strengths are prerequisite to the study of medicine. However, consideration of grades and test scores alone are insufficient to select a student body that will achieve a school’s distinct educational goals and mission. Thus, since well before *Grutter*, most medical schools have adopted holistic review processes similar to those upheld by this Court in *Grutter* and *Fisher II*.[[44]](#footnote-45) Holistic review is a flexible, highly individualized consideration of the multiple ways in which medical school applicants can demonstrate that they fit well within a given institution. In that regard, the process is not unlike judicial clerkship hiring, which also depends on holistic, individualized review that takes account of all attributes in the hope of fielding “a winning team, not just a single all-star.”[[45]](#footnote-46) The goal of most schools is to evaluate each applicant fully and individually, compiling a class of interdependent learners, and furthering each school’s educational mission.[[46]](#footnote-47)

### Medical Schools Have Historically Engaged In Highly Individualized Admissions Practices.

The qualities that make a healthcare professional successful are impossible to measure based on grades and test scores alone. “Medical educators agree that success in medical school requires more than academic competence; it also requires integrity, altruism, self-management, interpersonal and teamwork skills, among other characteristics.”[[47]](#footnote-48)

To assess these qualities, medical schools have a long history of highly-individualized admissions processes, including personal pre-admission inter­views for ***every*** accepted applicant. Although these processes vary by school, all medical schools consider a range of non-academic factors. Medical schools have never exclusively or even predominantly relied on numerical criteria to select their student bodies.[[48]](#footnote-49) While undergraduate GPA and MCAT scores are usually high on the list of considerations in deter­mining which applicants to interview, medical schools rank personal interviews and, to a lesser extent, letters of recommendation as the most important considerations in final acceptance decisions.[[49]](#footnote-50) Once an applicant meets the academic requirements to succeed in medical school, the MCAT score is no longer as important as other qualitative indicators of characteristics such as bedside manner, altruism, and community engagement.[[50]](#footnote-51) These qualitative factors are so critical that between 2019 and 2022, more than 15% of applicants with the highest combined GPAs and MCAT scores were rejected by ***all*** medical schools to which they applied.[[51]](#footnote-52)

Holistic review precludes any single criterion from becoming the uniform deciding factor for interviewing and selecting candidates for admission. Serious consideration is afforded to the ways in which each applicant might uniquely contribute to a diverse educational environment and the school’s specific mission. A survey of health-professional schools tied holistic review to the institution-specific missions of serving underserved rural communities, serving underserved urban communities, research, primary care, and global health.[[52]](#footnote-53)

For some schools, the range of factors considered during holistic review may include race and ethnicity. However, these factors are only considered where relevant to the applicant and only to as necessary to achieve articulated, mission-driven benefits. To the extent race is considered, this Court has already held that it should not be considered in isolation, and there is no reason to doubt that medical educators adhere to that directive. Race is con­sidered flexibly as just one of the many charac­teristics and pertinent elements of each individual’s background. Characteristics that make an individual particularly well-suited for the medical profession, such as resilience or the ability to overcome challenges, may in many cases be intertwined with a person’s race or ethnicity. Further, an applicant’s background is a strong predictor of the population or environment in which they will ultimately practice.[[53]](#footnote-54) For example, minority dental school applicants are more likely than their peers to rate “the desire to work in my own cultural community” as important influences on their choice of practice.[[54]](#footnote-55) And as noted above, minority health professionals have been historically and consistently more likely to follow through with stated commit­ments to serve underserved communities.[[55]](#footnote-56) Accordingly, when candidates have overcome challenges, experienced marginalization, or indicated a commitment to serving a particular place or community, obscuring or denying consideration of those applicants’ backgrounds will hinder a full appreciation of their potential contributions.

### It Remains Necessary For Medical Schools To Consider Applicants’ Full Backgrounds In Order To Achieve Educational And Professional Aims.

Consistent with the requirements of narrow tailoring, direct consideration of race may continue only as ***necessary*** to achieve core aspects of institutions’ educational missions. As evidenced by the degree of enduring under-representation in medicine for certain minority groups notwithstanding intensive efforts by medical schools to diversify their classes through race-neutral means, consideration of an applicant’s racial or ethnic background is still necessary if a school seeks diversity on those grounds.

Unlike other historically excluded groups, such as women,[[56]](#footnote-57) racial minorities did not organically achieve numerical parity in the health professions once the most obvious barriers to entry were removed. Minorities continue to be significantly underrepre­sented in the medical professions.[[57]](#footnote-58) In 2019, only 7.3% of advanced practice registered nurses, 5.2% of physicians, and 4.4% of dentists identified as black, as compared to 13.2% of the working age population. *Id*. Hispanic people (18.2% of the working age population) comprise only 5.5% of advanced practice registered nurses, 6.9% of physicians, and 5.7% of dentists. *Id*. When examined by medical specialty, under-representation has intensified over time, with black, Hispanic, and Native Americans showing statistically significant downward trends and deepening underrepresentation across nearly all ranks and specialties.[[58]](#footnote-59) Indeed, the percentages of students from one major demographic group—black males—has actually ***decreased*** from 1978, when *Bakke* was decided. That year, black men made up just 3.1% of the medical student body, and as of 2019 that number had decreased to 2.9%.[[59]](#footnote-60)

Medical schools continue to implement a host of race-neutral initiatives outside the admissions context to help achieve a diverse and culturally-comp­etent student body and physician workforce. Those initiatives have had some success in increasing the diversity of the medical school applicant pool. But this success has not been universal, and such initiatives are nowhere close to being a complete answer. To discharge their obligations to produce well-trained health professionals who are prepared to serve all of society, many medical schools continue to find it nec­essary to consider an applicant’s entire background, including race or ethnicity as one factor among many.

Ultimately, schools are constrained by the size and demographics of their own applicant pool and the overall applicant pool that year. For example, if, as in the most recent application cycle, there are only 105 Native American applicants in a single application cycle and 171 accredited medical schools,[[60]](#footnote-61) most schools will end up with zero Native American matriculants. Due to a combination of challenges, minority students are less likely to enroll in college,[[61]](#footnote-62) even less likely to graduate from a college that feeds into medical school,[[62]](#footnote-63) and are therefore less likely to have the resources and support to apply to medical school.[[63]](#footnote-64) Thus, health-professional schools make significant investments in early interventions to diversify the applicant pool, including mentoring and enrichment programs for middle school,[[64]](#footnote-65) high school,[[65]](#footnote-66) and college students;[[66]](#footnote-67) summer enrichment programs[[67]](#footnote-68) and other “pathway” programs that seek to encourage and prepare minority students to pursue health-professional education;[[68]](#footnote-69) and postbaccalaur­eate programs.[[69]](#footnote-70) But while these programs have shown some success,[[70]](#footnote-71) their overall impact is constrained by external demographic forces that are beyond schools’ ability to control.[[71]](#footnote-72)

Although minority medical school applicants are critically needed to serve underserved communities and enhance others’ education, their numbers, as noted above, remain very low. Even once exclusion at the higher-education level ceased, societal forces continue to prevent a disproportionate percentage of minority students from building upon a steady foundation for a career in medicine.[[72]](#footnote-73) Most medical school applicants’ prepara­tion begins at a young age, with successful applicants having been aided by a combination of early and ongoing resources, quality primary and college education, opportunities, mentoring, role models, financial stability, and academic preparation, among other factors.[[73]](#footnote-74)

Low-income applicants from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are significantly less likely to have benefitted from these ongoing and early support and resources. Between 73% and 79% of all students entering medical school were raised in homes in the top two household-income quintiles.[[74]](#footnote-75) And only 5% of medical school matriculants come from households in the lowest 20%. *Id.* Groups underrepresented in medicine disproportionately live in communities with lower household incomes and historically fewer opportunities for wealth accumulation, reducing the likelihood that members of those groups will have the resources to prepare for medical school. And counterintuitively, focusing in admissions on stat­istical information that correlates with race—such as socio-economic status—would likely ***reduce*** rather than increase the number of minority applicants accepted for admission, because low-income minority students are less likely than their non-minority peers to have had access to other resources and support in their early and collegiate years.[[75]](#footnote-76)

Further, medical and other advanced education runs in families. Fully 93% of medical school matriculants have a parent with an advanced degree, *id.*, and children and grandchildren of physicians are more likely to become physicians than children of other professions.[[76]](#footnote-77) The generational experiential inherit­ance of familial mentorship, beneficial connections, and immersive skill development increases the likelihood of pursuing the medical profession.[[77]](#footnote-78) But the numbers and overall percentages of minority physicians has been historically and enduringly small. Most medical schools did not admit students from ethnic and racial minority groups until the 1960’s and all but two medical schools opened specifically for black physicians were closed by 1923,[[78]](#footnote-79) serving as an absolute barrier to the accumulation of professional experiential wealth in these communities.[[79]](#footnote-80)

For these and other reasons, the legacy of American racial injustice has endured longer across the healthcare and medical-education systems than many might have predicted. As a result, notwithstanding significant investment and effort by health-professional programs, if a program seeks a racially diverse student body with more than token representation, most schools will necessarily continue to rely on the consideration of an applicant’s racial or ethnic background in some cases. And any prohibition on the consideration of race in student admissions will therefore result in a student body with significantly fewer minority students.

## PRECLUDING OR LIMITING HOLISTIC REVIEW WOULD CAUSE COMPOUNDING LOSS OF DIVERSITY AND THREATEN PATIENTS

For nearly 45 years, the Nation’s medical schools have utilized the kinds of holistic admissions processes this Court approved in *Bakke*, *Grutter*, and *Fisher II*. In the schools’ expert judgments, such practices are necessary to train physicians and other leaders in the health professions who can effectively serve an increasingly diverse society. Amici urge the Court not to disrupt that reliance by withdrawing its imprimatur from those longstanding practices.

The records of these cases confirm that no justification for parting from stare decisis exists here. For instance, far from being “unworkable,” *Payne* v. *Tennessee*, 501 U.S. 808, 827 (1991), the processes approved in *Grutter*, *Bakke*, and *Fisher II* continue to be the predominant modes of decision making employed by health-professional schools across the Nation. By contrast, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ***insulate*** all consideration of an applicant’s race or ethnicity from consideration of the rest of that individual’s background. Where an admissions process includes reliance on personal statements, for example, ignoring race and ethnicity “might not even be possible,” since “to read the file in a ‘colorblind’ way, the admissions officer would likely have to ignore highly relevant information, without which the applicant’s personal statement might literally not make sense.”[[80]](#footnote-81) And because minorities report at vastly higher rates than white Americans that their race is important to their self-perception and identity,[[81]](#footnote-82) requiring application materials to be truly race-blind would itself have a clear discriminatory effect. Medical school admissions, which have always relied heavily on personal interviews of every admitted applicant, could be drastically curtailed by such a system, to the ultimate detriment of the Nation’s health.

Moreover, overruling *Grutter* would potentially trigger a spiral of catastrophic and self-reinforcing decreases in diversity in the healthcare professions. States that have banned race-conscious admissions have seen the number of minority medical-school students drop by 17% as a result.[[82]](#footnote-83) That number reflects not only the immediate effect of alterations to medical-school admissions, but also the downstream effect of reduced diversity in under­graduate institutions in those states.[[83]](#footnote-84) Moreover, as the court of appeals acknowledged, part of the importance of maintaining a diverse student body stems from the fact that non-diverse institutions are less attractive and hospitable to minority applicants. Pet. App. 78-79. Diversity fosters more diversity, while homogen­eity fosters more homogeneity. Any consideration of whether to risk reducing diversity in higher education must account for the risk of such a spiral, where institutions become not only less diverse, but also unable to attract minority applicants by virtue of their lack of diversity. The result would be to profoundly reshape the American medical profession to a degree that is impossible to predict. If this Court were to take that step, it would imperil the lives and health of millions of Americans. Amici urge the Court to refrain from taking such a potentially dangerous action.

# CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, and those in respondents’ brief, the judgments should be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

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1. No counsel for a party authored this brief in whole or in part, and no such counsel or party made a monetary contribution intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief. No person other than amici or their counsel made a monetary contribution to this brief’s preparation or submission. The parties have consented to the filing of this brief. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As used in this brief, “minority” individuals include racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to the general population. This includes black and Hispanic Americans, and American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiians. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. *See* Kelly M. Hoffman et al., *Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences Between Blacks and Whites*, 113 Proceedings of Nat. Academy of Sciences 4296 (2016); Monika K. Goyal et al., *Racial Disparities in Pain Management of Children with Appendicitis in Emergency Departments*, 169 JAMA Pediatr. 996 (2015); Karn O. Anderson et al., *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Pain: Causes and Consequences of Unequal Care*, 10 J. Pain 1187 (2009); C.S. Cleeland et al., *Pain and Treatment of Pain in Minority Patients With Cancer*, Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group Minority Outpatient Pain Study, 127 Ann Intern Med. 813 (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Brad N. Greenwood et al., *Physician–Patient Racial Concordance and Disparities in Birthing Mortality for Newborns*, 117 PNAS 35, 21194-21200 (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. *See*, *e.g.*, Bruce G. Link, *Epidemiological Sociology and the Social Shaping of Population Health*, 49 J. of Health & Soc. Behav. 367 (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Virginia Tangel et al., *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Maternal Outcomes and the Disadvantage of Peripartum Black Women: A Multistate Analysis*, 2007-2014, Am. J. Perinatology 36(8), 835-848 (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *See*, *e.g.*, Joshua Aronson et al., *Unhealthy Interactions: the Role of Stereotype Threat in Health Disparities*, 103 Am. J. Pub. Health 50-56 (2013); Valentina A. Zavala, et al., *Cancer Health Disparities in Racial/Ethnic Minorities in the United States*, 124 Br. J. Cancer 315–332 (2021); Elbert J. Mets et al., *Persistent Disparities in Breast Cancer Surgical Outcomes Among Hispanic and African American Patients*, 45 European J. of Surgical Oncology 584-590 (2019); Paul Riviere et al., *Survival of African American and Non-Hispanic White Men With Prostate Cancer in an Equal-Access Health Care System*, 126 Cancer 1683-1690 (2020); Samir Soneji et al., *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Early-Stage Lung Cancer Survival*, 152 Chest 587–597 (2017). Such health inequities cannot be explained by genetics. Noah A. Rosenberg et al., *Genetic Structure of Human Populations*, 298 Science 5602 (2002) (confirming consensus that “race” is not genetic). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. *See*, *e.g.*, CDC, *Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death by Race/Ethnicity* (Feb 2, 2022) (https://tinyurl.com/2p8ft9hm). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. U.S. Dep’t of Health & Human Servs. (“HHS”), Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality, *2021 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report*, at ES-2 (2021) (https://tinyurl.com/3ek4zbay). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. *See* Link, *supra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. *See* Heena P. Santry & Sherry M. Wren, *The Role of Unconscious Bias in Surgical Safety and Outcomes*, 92 Surg. Clin. N. Am. 137 (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. *See*, *e.g.*, Joel S. Weissman et al., *Residents’ Preferences and Preparation for Caring for Underserved Populations*, 78 J. Urban Health 535 (2001); Kara Odom Walker et al., *The Association Among Specialty, Race, Ethnicity, and Practice Location Among California Physicians in Diverse Specialties*, 104 J. Nat’l Med. Ass’n 46 (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *See*, *e.g.*, Darcell P. Scharff et al., *More Than Tuskegee: Understanding Mistrust About Research Participation*, 21 J Health Care Poor Underserved 879-897 (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Pew Research Center, *Race in America 2019* (https://tinyurl.com/ypnametz); *see also* Christopher Mathis, *African Americans and Their Distrust of the Health Care System: Healthcare for Diverse Populations*, 14 Journal of Cultural Diversity No. 2 (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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18. S. Rep. No. 114-74, at 42 (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Patricia Pittman et al., *Health Workforce for Health Equity*, 59 Medical Care S405-S408 (2021); I.M. Xierali & M.A. Nivet, *The Racial and Ethnic Composition and Distribution of Primary Care Physicians*,  29 J. of Health Care For the Poor & Underserved 556–570 (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. *See* Somnath Saha & Scott A. Shipman, *Race-Neutral Versus Race-Conscious Workforce Policy To Improve Access To Care*, 27 Health Aff. 234 (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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24. *See* Joseph R. Betancourt et al., *Defining Cultural Competence: A Practical Framework for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Health and Health Care*, 118 Pub. Health Rep. 293, 297-300 (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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37. NIH, *Diversity Statement* (https://tinyurl.com/3b2xpdbm); *see also* Lu Hong & Scott E. Page, *Groups of Diverse Problem Solvers Can Outperform Groups of High-Ability Problem Solvers*, 101 Proc. Nat’l Acad. Sci. USA 16385 (2004); Valerie I. Sessa & Jodi J. Taylor, *Executive Selection: Strategies for Success* (Ctr. for Creative Leadership 2000)). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
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39. *See* Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-527, § 1(b)(12), 104 Stat. 2311, 2312 (1990) (finding that “diversity in the faculty and student body of health professions schools enhances the quality of education for all students attending the schools”) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
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41. *See*, *e.g.*, Robert A. Witzburg & Henry M. Sondheimer, *Holistic Review—Shaping the Medical Profession One Applicant at a Time*, 368 New Eng. J. Med. 1565, 1567 (2013) (according to medical school faculty, students selected through holistic review are “more collegial, more supportive of one another, more engaged in the curriculum, and more open to new ideas and to perspectives different from their own”) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. *See*, *e.g.*, LCME, Standards for Accreditation, *supra*, at 4 (Standard 3.3) (noting that a medical should maintain “effective policies” for “achiev[ing] mission-appropriate diversity outcomes”). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. *See*, *e.g.*, *Fisher II*, 579 U.S. at 388 (“Considerable deference is owed to a university in defining those intangible character­istics, like student body diversity, that are central to its identity and educational mission.”); *Fisher I*, 570 U.S. at 311 (“Grutter calls for deference to the University’s conclusion, ‘based on its experience and expertise,’ that a diverse student body would serve its educational goals.”) (citation omitted); *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 328 (“The Law School’s educational judgment that such diversity is essential to its educational mission is one to which we defer.”); *cf*. *Sch. Bd. of Nassau Cnty*. v. *Arline*, 480 U.S. 273, 288 (1987) (“courts normally should defer to the reasonable medical judgments of public health officials”). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. In 2014 , 93% of dental schools, 91% of medical schools, 82% MPH schools, 78% of pharmaceutical schools, and half of nursing schools surveyed utilize holistic review. *See* G. Glazer et al.., *Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Findings From A National Survey* (2014). Those numbers have undoubtedly increased since. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. *See*, *e.g.*, Christopher D. Kromphardt, *Fielding an Excellent Team: Law Clerk Selection and Chambers Structure at the U.S. Supreme Court*, 98 Marquette L. Rev. 289, 289 (2014) (noting that judges and Justices “exercise wide discretion when hiring law clerks”). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
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54. Elizabeth A. Mertz et al., *Underrepresented Minority Dentists: Quantifying Their Numbers And Characterizing The Communities They Serve*,  35 Health Aff. (Millwood) 2190 (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. *Supra* at \_\_ & nn. \_\_ [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Devin B Morris et al., *Diversity of the National Medical Student Body—Four Decades of Inequities*, 384 N. Engl. J. Med. 1661 (2021) (showing that medical school enrollment achieved representative gender equity around 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
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58. Elle Lett, Whitney U. Orji & Ronnie Sebro, *Declining Racial And Ethnic Representation In Clinical Academic Medicine: A Longitudinal Study of 16 US Medical Specialties* (Nov. 16, 2018) (https://tinyurl.com/2n5934vu). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
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60. AAMC, *Total Enrollment by U.S. MD-Granting Medical School and Race/Ethnicity (Alone), 2021-2022* (https://tinyurl.com/5n6f68mu) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. NCES, *College Enrollment Rates* (https://tinyurl.com/yr3wp9w7). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
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