

Opening Statement of Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (R-PA)  
Education and Workforce Committee  
Workforce Protections Subcommittee  
On Call for America: Strengthening Access Through  
Locum Tenens Providers  
June 9, 2026

(As prepared for delivery)

Today’s hearing will cover an important issue affecting our health care workforce and, ultimately, patient access to care.

Too often, patients struggle to obtain important medical services because of the long distance between their homes and providers. In rural Pennsylvania and many communities across the country, this can be especially challenging. Even after traveling long distances, or utilizing telehealth appointments, some patients may still face challenges in seeing a specialist if hospitals and health clinics in rural areas don’t currently have one on staff.

Imagine a situation in which there is only one specialty provider within a hundred miles of your home. If that provider changes careers, takes leave to care for a family member, or simply goes on vacation, patients can find themselves without care. To address these gaps, many rural hospitals turn to *locum tenens* providers, which is a Latin phrase for “place holding.” These health care providers usually operate as

independent contractors—rather than employees—and typically work in a role for no more than a year. They control their hours and practice. Like independent contractors in many other occupations, these providers value the flexibility and freedom this model offers.

The positions these providers often fill can be difficult to staff on a permanent basis. It takes an average of 189 days to recruit a primary care position and 226 days for a specialist. While *locum tenens* providers are critical in rural communities, their services are not limited to rural America. Some 88 percent of health care organizations utilize *locum tenens* providers to help meet patient needs.

Given the important role these clinicians play in our health care system, they deserve clear rules regarding their employment status. Yet, as we have seen in many other occupations, the law is not always clear on how *locum tenens* clinicians should be classified. Moreover, states take different approaches to defining independent contractors. As a result, these providers and the health care facilities that rely on them face needless uncertainty.

To address this problem, Congressman Burgess Owens introduced H.R. 8347, the *RURAL Healthcare Act*. This bill clarifies that qualified *locum tenens* providers are independent contractors under the *Fair Labor Standards Act* and *National Labor Relations Act*.

While no single policy will solve every challenge affecting our health care workforce, this bill offers a step in the right direction toward bolstering patient health care access, particularly in rural communities.

At the end of the day, improving health outcomes for all Americans begins with ensuring patients can access the right care at the right time. Greater clarity in the law stands to benefit our patients, health facilities, and the communities they serve.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.