

March 14, 2023

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Klobuchar and Collins:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I want to express our support for S. 665, the “Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act,” which would reauthorize and make targeted improvements to the J-1 visa waiver program in a manner that helps alleviate the shortage of physicians, especially in rural and underserved areas, and promotes a more diversified workforce.

In 2021, 25 percent of licensed U.S. physicians were international medical graduates (IMGs), with the number of IMGs in active practice growing by nearly 18 percent since 2010.¹ These non-U.S. citizen IMGs play a critical role in providing health care to many Americans, especially in areas of the country with higher rates of poverty and chronic disease. For example, over the past 15 years, more than 10,000 J-1 IMGs have worked in underserved communities.² Moreover, nearly 21 million people live in areas of the U.S. where foreign-trained physicians account for at least half of all physicians.³ As such, it is important to support and create pathways for these physicians to be able to continue to remain in the U.S. and care for their patients.

Currently, resident physicians from other countries working in the U.S. on J-1 visas are required to return to their home country after their residency has ended for two years before they can apply for another visa or a green card. The Conrad 30 program allows these physicians to remain in the U.S. without having to return to their home country if they agree to practice in an underserved area for three years. With a projected shortfall of nearly 124,000 physicians by 2034, many communities, including rural and low-income urban districts, are already experiencing problems meeting their patient care needs.⁴ Despite the physician workforce challenges, research conducted in 2020 concluded there are between 14,710 and 16,189 U.S.-trained IMGs in active practice awaiting permanent residency.⁵ As such, Conrad 30 is a valuable program that ensures that physicians, who are often educated and trained in the U.S., can continue to provide care for their U.S. patients.⁶

¹ <https://www.ama-assn.org/education/international-medical-education/how-imgs-have-changed-face-american-medicine>.

² <https://www.kunr.org/post/visa-program-enables-foreign-doctors-work-underserved-communities#stream/0>.

³ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained-doctors-are-critical-to-serving-many-us-communities.pdf>.

⁴ <https://www.aamc.org/media/54681/download>.

⁵ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7599012/pdf/ZJCH_10_1816274.pdf

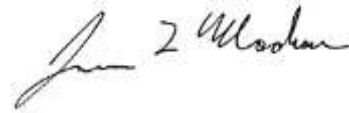
⁶ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/us-physician-shortage-growing>.

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If enacted, this legislation would reauthorize the Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program for an additional three years, protecting patient access to care in medically underserved areas. This bill also makes improvements to the program by requiring transparency in employment contract terms, creating additional waivers for states that utilize this program, and protecting spouses and children of physicians in the program. Moreover, this legislation would provide physicians who practice in underserved areas for five years priority access within the green card system, thereby helping to address the current physician green card backlog.

IMGs play a vital role in the U.S. health care system, and reauthorizing the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act will help ensure continued care in medically underserved communities across the U.S. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara", written in a cursive style.

James L. Madara, MD