



April 20, 2021

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Washington DC 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn
US Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
US Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Senators Durbin, Cornyn, Leahy, and Collins:

On behalf of the Society of General Internal Medicine (SGIM), I write to share our organization's support for the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (S.1024, H.R.2255).

The proposed bill is an important step to address an immediate need that was exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This bipartisan legislation will recapture 40,000 unused employment-based visas and use them to expedite the processing of immigration petitions for immigrant doctors and nurses. This legislation will help to fill healthcare staffing shortages and ensure that all Americans have access to high quality medical care.

SGIM is a member-based association of about 3000 general internists devoted to teaching and research in medical centers throughout the country, who are dedicated to improving access to care for all people and eliminating healthcare disparities. Our mission is to cultivate innovative educators, researchers, and clinicians in general internal medicine, leading the way to better health for everyone. Our members advance the practice of medicine by giving comprehensive coordinated care to adults, educating the next generation of physicians, and conducting cutting-edge research to improve quality of care and clinical outcomes. Our members include general internists and hospitalists who are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic caring for patients each day.

Numerous general internists and hospitalists are highly trained immigrant physicians, many of whom are prevented from going whether their expertise is needed because of limitations on their work permits and being on the green card backlog. Additionally, international physicians face the threat of deportation if they have a long-term disabling illness from COVID-19 because their immigration status, and often that of their families, is tied to their continued employment.



The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act will provide an immediate solution to these concerns and bring providers to the front lines quickly. By recapturing 15,000 unused employment-based immigrant visas from prior years for physicians, and 25,000 for nurses, this legislation will provide a fast track to permanent residency for these frontline healthcare providers who play a vital role in providing care to our communities. Permanent residency status will ensure that international internal medicine physicians and their colleagues in other medical specialties can meet urgent health care needs during this public health emergency without fear that their legal status in the U.S. is in jeopardy. Quick enactment of this legislation is not only a necessary health care workforce policy to respond to the pandemic — it is only fair for the immigrant physicians who have come from all over the world to provide needed care for Americans.

International medical graduates, having done residency training in the US, and who are board certified in respective specialties and licensed to practice in the US, have long played an important role in addressing the need for more health care providers, comprising roughly a quarter of the U.S. physician workforce. Currently, resident physicians from other countries working in the U.S. on J-1 visa waivers are required to return to their home country after their residency has ended for two years before they can apply for any other visa. The Conrad 30 program allows these physicians to remain in the U.S. without having to return home if they agree to practice in an underserved area for three years. Many communities, including rural and low-income urban districts, depend on the physicians in this program to provide health care services. SGIM believes that Congress should also reauthorize the Conrad State 30 & Physician Access Act that would reauthorize the J-1 visa waiver program for an additional three years, protecting patient access to care in medically underserved areas.

We fully support your reintroduction of the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act to help address the unprecedented challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the surge of medical complications with chronic sequelae that will surface as we reopen the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric B. Bass". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric B. Bass, MD, MPH