



April 2, 2008

The Honorable Kent Conrad  
United States Senate  
530 Senate Hart Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Association of  
American Medical Colleges  
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**Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.**  
President and Chief Executive Officer

Dear Senator Conrad:

Thank you for your leadership in helping ensure that our nation's underserved have access to physicians. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) supports your proposed expansion and permanent reauthorization of the Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program under the "Conrad State 30 Improvement Act" (S. 2672). The AAMC is a not-for-profit association representing all 129 accredited U.S. medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems; and 94 academic and scientific societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC represents 109,000 faculty members, 67,000 medical students, and 104,000 resident physicians.

International medical graduates represent about a quarter of all physicians in training and actively practicing medicine in the U.S. Since its inception in 1994, the Conrad 30 program (together with similar federal J-1 visa waiver programs) has directed more than 14,000 physicians into health professions shortage areas (HPSAs). Today, the Conrad 30 program accounts for over 80 percent of all J-1 visa waiver requests for physicians. Despite this success, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that almost 16,000 additional primary care physicians are needed to achieve the target HPSA physician to population ratio (1:2,000).

The AAMC supports your proposed reforms for the Conrad 30 program that will help address the program's current inefficiencies as well as the deficiency of physicians to provide care for our nation's underserved. Your bill will eliminate the need for repeated reauthorization of the Conrad 30 program, which has caused disruption of and created uncertainty in the process of requesting J-1 visa waivers for physicians. S. 2672 also will increase the number of Conrad 30 J-1 waivers to address the increased need of HPSAs, while maintaining a well-balanced national distribution. Furthermore, the bill will grant states more flexibility by increasing from 5 to 10 the number of "flex-slots" that states can use to place physicians in non-HPSA facilities that serve patients who live in underserved areas. Finally, your proposed green card cap exemption would provide an important incentive for physicians to practice in underserved communities.

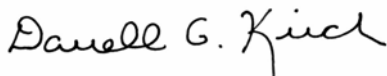
While S. 2672 will direct more physicians into health professions shortage areas, the AAMC remains concerned that there will continue to be greater incentives for international medical graduates to enter on H-1b visas than on J-1 visas. The AAMC believes that the J-1 visa is the most appropriate visa for non-U.S. citizen graduates of international medical schools entering graduate medical education programs in the U.S. The H-1b visa (an employment visa) is not appropriate for physicians coming to the U.S. for education and training purposes.

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The primary purpose of graduate medical education is education and training. The J-1 visa's purpose is educational and its administration by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) assures that J-1 residents and fellows possess valid medical education credentials, have successfully passed Steps 1 and 2 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination, have been accepted for training by an accredited U.S. graduate medical education program affiliated with a U.S. medical school, and that their country of origin needs the knowledge and skills that they will obtain through their education in the U.S. No other immigration program or visa category is as consistent with the aims of U.S. graduate medical education or offers an equal assurance of the quality of entrants.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important matter. I look forward to working with you to permanently reauthorize the Conrad State 30 program with these positive changes and to address the AAMC's concerns with the physician visa pathways in broader immigration reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrell G. Kirch". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.