



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

February 1, 2012

The Honorable Kent Conrad  
United States Senate  
530 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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. 1979). The AAMC is a not-for-profit association representing all 136 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 62 Department of Veterans Affairs' medical centers; and nearly 90 academic and scientific societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC represents 128,000 faculty members, 75,000 medical students, and 110,000 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 has directed more than 9,000 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 5,800 additional primary care clinicians are needed to achieve the target HPSA practitioner 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 disrupted and created uncertainty in the process of requesting J-1 visa waivers for physicians. Furthermore, S. 1979 will increase the number of Conrad 30 J-1 waivers to address the increased need of HPSAs, while maintaining a well-balanced national distribution. Finally, the improved access to green cards for physicians who have completed their service commitment would provide an important incentive to practice in our nation's underserved communities.

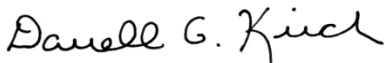
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While S. 1979 will direct more physicians into health professions shortage areas, the AAMC remains concerned that there will continue to be greater incentives for international medical graduates to enter on H-1b visas than on J-1 visas. The AAMC believes 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.

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 reauthorize permanently 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.