



**Association of
American Medical Colleges**
655 K Street, N.W., Suite 100, Washington, D.C. 20001-2399
T 202 828 0460 F 202 862 6161
www.aamc.org

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer

July 28, 2015

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
United States Senate
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

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

The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senators Klobuchar, Moran, Collins, and Heitkamp:

Thank you for your leadership in helping ensure that our nation's medically underserved have access to physicians. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) is pleased to endorse the "Conrad 30 and Physician Access Act" (S. 1189) to improve and make permanent the State Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program.

The AAMC is a not-for-profit association representing all 144 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 51 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and nearly 90 academic and scientific societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC represents 148,000 faculty members, 83,000 medical students, and 115,000 resident physicians.

The AAMC projects a nationwide shortage of between 46,000-90,000 physicians by 2025. Though these shortfalls will affect all Americans, the most vulnerable populations in underserved areas will be the first to feel the impact (e.g., the Department of Veterans Affairs, Medicare and Medicaid patients, rural and urban community health centers, and the Indian Health Service). The AAMC also believes the primary barrier for graduates of international medical schools to practicing in the U.S. is the cap on Medicare support for GME imposed by the Balance Budget Act of 1997. Eliminating this bottleneck in the medical education pipeline is critical to improving physician immigration and addressing national workforce shortages.

International medical graduates play an important role in the U.S. physician workforce, representing about a quarter of practicing physicians. The AAMC believes the J-1 exchange visitor visa is the most appropriate pathway for non-U.S. citizens to pursue U.S. graduate medical education, a requirement to practice medicine in our country. The

J-1 visa helps ensure a balanced physician immigration policy that prevents “brain drain,” while improving access in our nation’s underserved communities through programs like Conrad 30.

In the last decade alone, the Conrad 30 program has directed nearly 10,000 physicians into health professions shortage areas (HPSAs), more than even the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). Despite this success, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that as of September 30, 2014, there were more than 59 million people living in primary care HPSAs and it would take over 8,100 new primary care physicians to fill these deficits.

Importantly, S. 1189 would provide up to three J-1 visa waivers per fiscal year per state for physicians in academic medical centers. Our nation’s medical schools and teaching hospitals train all J-1 visa physicians, but are often prohibited from recruiting these physicians. This creates an improper incentive for academic medical centers to train physicians with H-1b temporary worker visas, allowing immigrating physicians to circumvent public service programs like Conrad 30.

The AAMC supports your proposed reforms for the Conrad 30 program that will help address the program’s current inefficiencies. 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. 1189 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, your proposed green card cap exemption would provide an important incentive for Conrad 30 physicians to continue practicing in underserved communities.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important matter. I look forward to working with you to reauthorize permanently the State Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program with these positive changes and on legislation to help address nationwide physician workforce shortages.

Sincerely,

Darrell G. Kirch

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.