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EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, CEO

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L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director Cissna:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to voice our concern about the substantial H-1B visa backlog for highly skilled employees, such as international medical graduates (IMGs) who are actively practicing in the U.S., due to the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrants under the federal Immigration and Nationality Act. We implore the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to clear the backlog for conversion from H1-B visas for physicians to permanent resident status.

Many of these physicians have been waiting for decades to receive their green cards due to the per-country cap. These physicians play a critical role in providing health care to many Americans because they tend to choose primary-care specialties and work in areas of the country with higher rates of poverty; they are providing important medical services to communities in need. According to a recent report, about 20.8 million Americans live in areas where at least half of the physicians are foreign-trained.

Workforce experts predict that the U.S. will face a significant physician shortage for both primary care and specialty physicians over the next 10 years due primarily to the growth and aging of the population and the impending retirement of many physicians. The impact of this physician shortage will disproportionately affect vulnerable and underserved populations around the country. Currently, more than 85 million people live in parts of the U.S. that have been designated as primary medical care health professional shortage areas. An estimated 15,000 physicians are needed nationwide to remove this designation. The six-year limit on H-1B visas, coupled with a USCIS policy “instructing its officers to apply the same level of scrutiny to both initial petitions and extension requests for certain nonimmigrant visa categories” is creating additional roadblocks for these physicians who are providing quality health care to some of the neediest Americans with some of the most complex health issues. As a result, it is critical that we work to immediately clear the large H-1B visa backlog for IMGs who are actively practicing in the U.S. and provide them with permanent resident status.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President for Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org or by calling 202-789-7409, should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD