



90 Years of Caring for Children—1930–2020

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May 14, 2020

The Honorable David Perdue
United States Senate
455 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Todd Young
United States Senate
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Dick Durbin
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Coons
United States Senate
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Perdue, Durbin, Young, Coons, Cornyn, and Leahy:

On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, I write to express our strong support for the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (S. 3599) and urge the Senate to swiftly pass this legislation. International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are a vital part of the U.S. health care workforce, and it is essential that Congress act immediately to provide them with durable immigration status that will enable them to provide desperately needed care to children and adults for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The time is now to recognize the critical contributions of IMGs to the U.S. health care workforce by facilitating access to much-needed permanent residency.

Physicians and allied health providers are the backbone of the U.S. health care system, translating scientific knowledge into clinical care that cures disease, ensures healthy development, and improves life outcomes. However, there has long been an inadequate supply of physicians to meet need, and pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists are no exception. Workforce shortages and maldistributions limit access to care for children and have significant implications for their long-term health and development. From continued access to lifesaving vaccines to screening for mental health to the care of children with special health care needs, the COVID-19 pandemic has only further exposed the need for robust systems of care for children and families and made it more necessary than ever to bolster the health care workforce.

International Medical Graduates have long played an important role in addressing the need for additional health care providers, comprising roughly a quarter of the U.S. physician workforce. While some IMGs are U.S. citizens educated abroad, many IMGs are foreign nationals practicing in the United States on nonimmigrant work visas. Indeed, foreign national physicians are more likely than U.S. citizen physicians to work in underserved areas, providing needed care to communities that lack it, thanks in large part to policies that provide access to work permits in exchange for practicing in these areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted vulnerabilities for foreign national IMGs that threaten their ability to continue providing needed care for children and families. Visa restrictions that specify worksites are preventing IMGs from being redeployed to meet need, whether that means providing care in COVID-19 hotspots or vaccinating children in underserved communities. These restrictions are leaving a critical number of physicians on the sidelines when they are needed most. Additionally, foreign national physicians whose immigration status, and often that of their families, is tied to their continued employment face the threat of deportation should they face a long-term disabling illness or death resulting from COVID-19.

The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act will provide a long-term 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, this legislation will provide a fast track to permanent residency for IMGs who play a vital role in providing care to our communities. Permanent residency status will ensure that foreign national pediatricians 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 a matter of fairness for the immigrant physicians who have come from all over the world to provide needed care for Americans.

Thank you for your work to advance this important workforce policy. If we can be of further assistance, please contact James Baumberger in the AAP Washington Office at jbaumberger@aap.org or 202-347-8600.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara Goza".

Sara H. Goza, MD, FAAP
President