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May 19, 2020

The Honorable Steven Palazzo
United States House of Representatives
2349 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Palazzo:

On behalf of the 4,800 physician and medical student members of the Mississippi State Medical Association, I want to express our support for H.R. 6788, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act, and ask for your consideration to co-sponsor this critically important bi-partisan legislation to improve access to care in medically underserved communities.

Currently, both the House (H.R. 6788) and Senate (S.3599) are considering the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act which would enhance our nation's physician and nurse workforce during the COVID-19 crisis by recapturing unused immigrant visas. The ability to recapture 15,000 unused employment-based physician immigrant visas from prior fiscal years would help facilitate our U.S. physicians to have the support they need and our U.S. patients to have the care they deserve.

The bill would further alleviate visa based restrictions for U.S. trained and licensed international physicians so that the physicians and nurses fighting on the frontlines of this COVID-19 pandemic can be deployed whenever and wherever they are needed both now and in the future. For example, with the passage of H.R. 6788, approximately one-hundred physicians currently working at the University of Mississippi Medical Center on visas would be allowed to be mobilized during this pandemic to areas in Mississippi hardest hit. By increasing the number of visas available to international medical graduates, care for those in the most vulnerable populations will be better served and the overall health care system will be strengthened.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever we need all physicians on the frontlines to meet health care needs. The Mississippi State Medical Association urges the Senate to pass this important bipartisan legislation. Thank you again for your support of the profession of medicine and protecting the physician's ability to provide safe and dependable patient care.

Warmest regards,

J. Clay Hays, Jr., MD
President
Mississippi State Medical Association