

William Hirota, MD
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May 28, 2020

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Delivered via email

Re: Support for the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act and the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act

Dear members of Washington state's congressional delegation,

On behalf of the Washington State Medical Association and our physician and physician assistant members across the state, we are writing in support of legislation to increase access to care and promote the ability of International Medical Graduates to practice medicine in our communities. We urge your support for the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (S. 3599/H.R. 6788) and the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S.948/H.R. 2895).

International Medical Graduates are vital members of the U.S. physician community, providing quality care to patients – often in underserved communities and to vulnerable populations. The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act allows for the recapturing of up to 15,000 physician immigrant visas that went unused during prior fiscal years. Integrating IMGs to the health care system increases access to care for patients and helps alleviate demand on the existing physician workforce in the U.S., especially as the pandemic persists. More IMGs means that the U.S. can increase its response efforts and prepare for future demands that may be placed on our health care system.

We all know that the U.S. is facing a severe physician workforce shortage – current projections indicate that there will be a shortfall of nearly 122,000 physicians by 2032 – but some areas of our state and our country are particularly medically underserved. The Physician Access Reauthorization Act would reauthorize the Conrad 30 Waiver Program, which enables resident physicians from other countries that are working in the U.S. on J-1 visas to remain in the U.S. if they agree to practice in a medically underserved area for three years.

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Here in Washington state, as we prepared for a potential surge in COVID-19 patients, retired physicians were asked to return to the workforce and out-of-state physicians were asked to travel across state lines to meet the demands placed on the state's health care delivery systems. While the surge did not manifest as acutely as feared, the pandemic has highlighted the physician workforce shortage we were already facing. Many measures will need to be taken to comprehensively address physician workforce, but empowering IMGs will help build the capacity health care systems need to combat potential surges of COVID-19 cases and its long-term impacts. We urge you to support these bills.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued efforts to maintain the health and well-being of our state's residents. If you have questions or if we can be of assistance to your office in any way, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William K. Hirota". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "H".

William K. Hirota, MD
WSMA President