



Hollie A. Davis Frick
Assistant General Counsel

June 3, 2020

VIA EMAIL:

The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Dan Sullivan
The Honorable Representative Don Young

Re: Support for the Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act (S. 3599 and H.R. 6788) and Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S. 948 and H.R. 2895)

Dear State of Alaska's Congressional Delegation:

On behalf of PeaceHealth, a mission-driven, not-for-profit Catholic healthcare system which employs approximately 16,000 physicians, nurses and other healthcare workers in Washington, Oregon, and Alaska, I write to share our organization's strong support for the Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act as well as the Conrad State 30 and Physician Reauthorization Act. Both these bills have garnered significant bi-partisan support and can work either separately or in unison to greatly improve access to healthcare without cost to taxpayers. ***Due to the severe physician workforce shortage, the need for physician immigration reform has always been important in order to hire and retain foreign-born physicians. Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need has become urgent and we request your timely support.***

PeaceHealth provides primary and specialty care services to patients in Healthcare Professional Shortage Areas throughout the Pacific Northwest and we rely on International Medical Graduates (IMGs) to help fill our critical workforce needs to meet the medical demands of our communities. PeaceHealth currently employs IMGs as Geriatricians, Pulmonologists, Critical Care Physicians, Hospitalists, Primary Care Physicians, Psychiatrists, Cardiologists, Oncologists, Gastroenterologists, Neurologists, Endocrinologists, Rheumatologists, and Sleep Medicine Physicians who would directly benefit from passage of one or both bills. Now more than ever, the hard work and dedication of our IMGs is evident as our country grapples with a response to the public and mental health emergency caused by the COVID-19 virus. If we fail to respond to the valid immigration concerns of IMGs, talented foreign physicians who were trained in the United States will leave this country behind in order to continue their medical practice in countries where they have less COVID-19 exposure and a more certain future for both themselves and their families. Some of these physicians have put their lives at risk to help American citizens by working in COVID-19 hotspots, and it is time for us to return the favor and help them.

Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act

The innovative Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act would authorize issuance of 40,000 immigrant visas, which were previously unused in other immigration categories, and allocate 15,000 for physicians and 25,000 for nurses. This legislation addresses the current visa backlog and is an important and incremental step in resolving an on-going healthcare/immigration issue while addressing the immediate need presented by the current COVID-19 pandemic. This bill will provide many of PeaceHealth's foreign-born physicians who were trained in the United States and are already here working in the Pacific Northwest under temporary H-1B work visas, an immediate pathway to green card. This is not only a substantial benefit/reward for the foreign physicians currently working at great personal risk to serve our communities, but even more importantly, helps employers better utilize the talents of these Physicians in real-time exactly where they are needed, rather than navigate the restrictive worksite-, position-, and employer-specific H-1B regulations.

Similarly, PeaceHealth relies on our ability to hire and retain talented foreign nurses to serve our patients and would also benefit greatly by the 25,000 immigrant visas allocated for nurses under this bill. Since nurses are generally not eligible for H-1B visas, we are forced to rely solely on temporary TN work visas based on the NAFTA treaty or the long process of immigrant visa sponsorship for foreign nurses. The Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act would significantly shorten the wait time for nurses to obtain immigrant visas abroad and enter the United States to assist with COVID-19 relief efforts as well as help supplement the nursing workforce.

Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act

Unlike the Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act, the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act addresses a longer-term need for qualified Physicians in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) and Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs) throughout the United States. It provides clarifications and adjustments to the already existing Physician National Interest Waiver program to provide real incentives for foreign physicians to serve in HPSAs and MUAs by allowing Physicians who complete five years of qualifying service to be *immediately eligible* to immigrate notwithstanding backlogs in the employment-based immigrant visa preference categories. This helps address the issue of what happens when the 15,000 Physician visas which may be allotted under the Healthcare Workforce Resiliency Act are used up. Additionally, the Conrad State 30 Physician Access Reauthorization Act provides a mechanism for the per-state waiver maximum to increase beyond 30 for all states in situations of high and increasing demand for waiver slots nationwide.

As a major healthcare employer in the state of Washington, we thank you for your serious consideration of these bills. We see them as complementary actions: the HealthCare Workforce Resiliency Act addressing the current visa backlog in an effort to support COVID-19 relief, and the Conrad State 30 Physician Access Reauthorization Act upgrading currently existing

Physician immigration programs to incentivize IMGs to build their practices in rural America by eliminating future Physician backlogs in exchange for work in HPSAs or MUAs.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at HDavisFrick@peacehealth.org or (360) 729-1892 or on my cell (503) 703-4434 if PeaceHealth can be of assistance in any way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hollie A. Davis Frick". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Hollie A. Davis Frick
Assistant General Counsel