

July 1, 2020

Dear Senator Peters and Stabenow:

On behalf of MidMichigan Health, I am writing to strongly support the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (HWRA) S.3599 that was introduced to the Senate Judiciary Committee in May. This bill makes previously unused immigrant visas available to nurses and physicians who petition for such a visa before the date that is 90 days after the end of the declared national emergency relating to the COVID-19 (i.e., coronavirus disease 2019) outbreak. Visas provided under this bill shall be exempt from per-country limitations. Many U.S. Senators have already co-sponsored this bill and I am hopeful that you will join that growing bipartisan group.

MidMichigan Health serves 23 rural communities, and we have experienced these same struggles with immigrant visas. As an example, we have one physician who has been in the US since 2009, and the application for permanent residency was approved in 2014. Unfortunately, due to country cap regulations, this physician will need to wait several decades to acquire a Green Card. We also have other circumstances that are similar in our provider community. As per the www.travel.state.gov website, applications for Green Cards from June 2009 are currently being processed under the employment-based category 2 (EB2) for immigrants from India. As frontline workers, the uncertainty of visa status adds to the fear with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

There has never been a more urgent need for the care that foreign-born physicians and foreign-trained nurses provide than during the current COVID-19 pandemic. These professionals play a critical role in ensuring the health of our communities, and they are required to meet rigid standards of equivalent education, English fluency and state licensure, and must have clean disciplinary records. Foreign-trained nurses do not displace American workers; in fact, the demand for nurses continues to grow. Many Foreign-trained nurses are recruited to rural and inner-city hospitals, locations that find it more difficult to recruit domestically. The foreign-born doctors your legislation assists with immigrant visas are already working in the United States so they will not displace any domestic doctors with this change.

A targeted allocation of recaptured visas to these health care professionals will have a tremendous impact on the ability to care for patients, and it will have a lasting impact on the overall health of our communities. The physicians provided assistance will gain flexibility in work assignment and will be better able to lend their skills where they are most needed.

The widespread approval of this bill is evidenced by multiple medical associations and hospital systems supporting the bill. MidMichigan Health thanks you for your understanding of the critical care foreign-trained and foreign-born physicians and nurses provide to Americans across the country and how urgent the need is for additional health care providers and flexibility with work assignments at this time. I look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,



Diane Shields, System Vice President
Corporate Marketing/Legislative Relations
MidMichigan Health